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To ... TRUTH (Advaita) a freer and fuller scope in elevating the lives ... and leavening the mass of mankind, we start this Advaita ... on the Himalayan heights... — Swami Vivekananda

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PRABUDDHA BHARA

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, MAYAVATI CENTENARY NUMBE

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The Road to Wisdom

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Swami Vivekananda on

THE MAKINGS OF A TRUE LEADER

The Prerequisites

What you call majority is mainly composed of fools and men of common intellect. Men who have brains to think for themselves are few, everywhere. These few men with brains are the real leaders in everything and in every department of work;... but unless the commanding officer goes ahead and faces death, the rank and file will never fight with heart. It is the same in every branch. "A captain must sac-ifice his head," they say. If you can lay n your life for a cause, then only you leader. But we all want to be lead-naking the necessary sacrifice. s zero—nobody listens to is not in organisation est, the real test, of idely different their com-nly be

There must not be a shade of jealousy or selfishness, then you are a leader...The best leader, however, is one who "leads like the baby". The baby, though apparently depending on everyone, is the king of the household. At least, to my thinking, that is the secret... Many feel, but only a few can express. It is the power of expressing one's love and appreciation and sympathy for others, that enables one person to succeed better in spreading the idea than others.

The Perfect Combination, Character Coupled With Love

There is no allegiance possible where there is no character in the leader,...Nobody will come to help you if you put yourself forward... one must crush all one's own self under the feet of the community...if you want to succeed...A leader must be mpersonal...should learn to obey before he ommand...he who is the servant of all rue master. He never becomes a hose love there is a consider-low. He whose love knows hole world lying at his

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started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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---Swami Vivekananda

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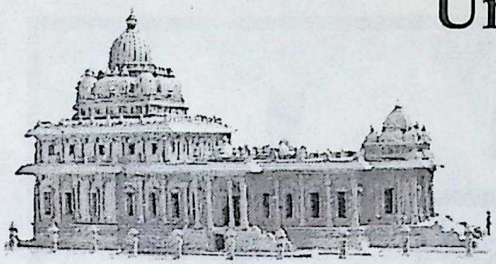

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An Appeal

Dear Friend,

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, was started in 1897 under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda. It has completed 100 years of its multidimensional services. For many years it has been the ardent desire of devotees and admirers that a grand temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna should be built in the Math.

The temple will be universal in character as Sri Ramakrishna is the prophet of harmony and universality, and his message meets the needs and demand of the modern age. A life-size marble image will be installed inside the temple.

Designed to accommodate about 1,000 devotees for prayer and meditation, the proposed temple will combine the distinct characteristics of Ramakrishna temples with traditional Temple Architecture of South India. The temple is estimated to cost Rs. 6.5 crore.

The foundation for the temple was laid by Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Order, on 1 December 1994.

The construction work is making satisfactory progress. It is expected to be inaugurated by the beginning of the new century.

A holy undertaking of this type and magnitude requires the goodwill and support of all the public.

We invite you to participate in this noble project and donate liberally.

Your contributions will be gratefully accepted and acknowledged. Crossed cheques or drafts may be drawn in favour of SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH, CHENNAI.

Swami Gautamananda
President

For details contact: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai-4. Ph: 494 1231, 4941959, Fax: 493 4589
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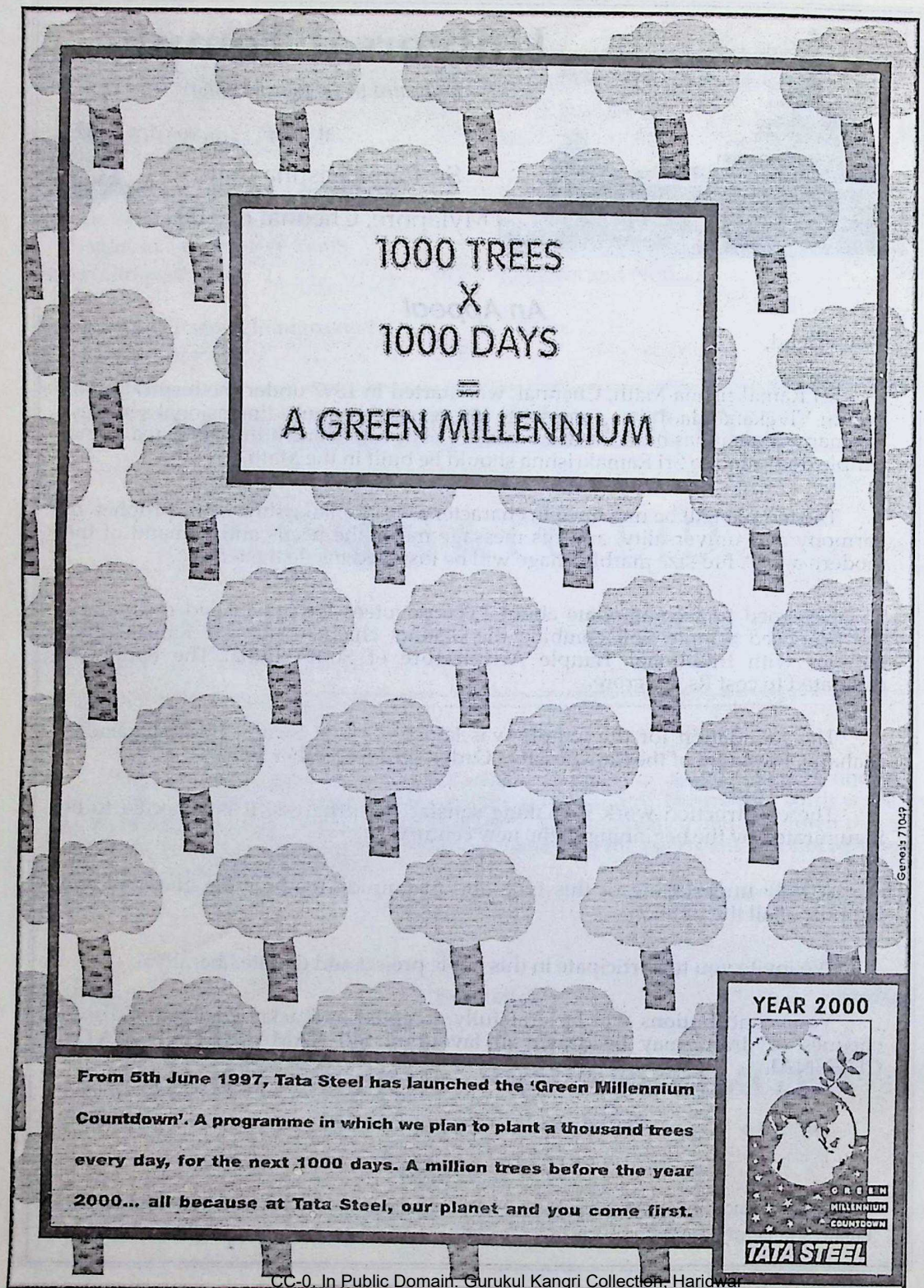

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Stories from Indian Epics

THE OTHER FACE OF DEATH

The major philosophical and religious systems of India maintain that every *jiva* - the embodied soul - shall ultimately realize its true nature and become free. But till the *jiva* arrives at this stage, it has to pass through various kinds, and degrees of experiences, at different levels of existences.

A soul simply cannot undergo all the necessary experiences (of pleasure, pain, knowledge, ignorance etc.), and of the various planes (eg. from that of a king to a beggar), in just a single body. Death is therefore indispensable for the soul's further evolution. The Bhagavad Gita declares: *Even as a man casts off worn-out garments and puts on new ones, similarly the soul discards worn-out bodies and enters into others which are new.*

Yet death, with its macabre certainty, remains terrifying, mysterious and all-powerful. The soul through ignorance feels it will be annihilated, and clings to life with all its might.

There is a touching mythological story which tells how in the beginning, there being no death, life became inordinately long and monotonous. With the multiplication of all life-forms, chaos reigned everywhere. Lord Shiva along with the divine sage Narada went up to Brahma, the creator God, and coerced him to create death, which would automatically bring in order.

Brahma seeing the logic, through his powers condensed a portion of light streaming from the south, into that of a young woman, whom he named *Mrityu* - death - and appraised her of her duties. Hearing her father's command, she burst out crying and beseeched to be excused. Brahma tried consoling her while collecting the freely flowing tears from her face. The aggrieved girl broke loose, fled and tried to assuage her grief through prayers and meditations in a solitary place.

Brahma gave his child some time to calm down then led her back, making her understand, that death in the universe, was imperative for the proper order and evolution of his creation. *Mrityu* would incur no sin for her work he assured, and also gave her Yama - the god of death -, as companion. Blessing *Mrityu* profusely he returned the tears, which by then had changed into various forms of pains and diseases, to aid her in her travails.

Thus bidden, dutiful *Mrityu* unceasingly works.

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जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

Vol. 104 JANUARY 1999 No. 1

VEDIC PRAYERS

उषा आ भाहि भानुना चन्द्रेण दुहितर्दिवः।
आवहन्ती भूर्यस्मभ्यम् सौभगं
व्युच्छन्ती दिविष्टिषु॥
Ṛgveda, 1.48.9

O Mother of dawn (*Uṣā*)! Graciously reveal yourself along with your blissful light (which is soothing). Day after day, bestow all that is good on us. Please dispel the darkness in and around us.

वाचस्पतिं विश्वकर्माणमूतये
मनोजुवम् वाजे अद्या हुवेम।
स नो विश्वानि हवनानि
जोषद्विश्व शम्भूरवसे साधुकर्मा॥
Ṛgveda, 10.81.7

Today, at the beginning of this sacrifice, we fervently pray for protection to the supreme Being (who is the creator of the universe, *Viśvakarmā*). He is the ruler of speech (*Vācaspati*). May our minds rest in Him. He is the source of all benevolence and well-being. All His actions are excellent. May He accept all the fruits of our sacrifices and protect us always. ❐

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To Our Readers

Prabuddha Bharata, with this issue, is entering its 104th year of publication. Started in July 1896 at Madras (now called Chennai), the Journal lost its gifted and young Editor, Mr. Rajam Iyer, in 1898 May and the Journal ceased publication in 1898 July. It was revived by Swami Vivekananda who infused fresh life and vigour into it. Stationed at Almora in the Thompson House, Swami Swarupananda became its Editor and the Sevier couple helped him in every way. The first issue of the revived Journal came out in August 1898. But Mr. Sevier keenly felt the inadequacy of the solitude of Almora, and so he and Swami Swarupananda looked for a place deeper in the Himalayas. Thus came to be established the Ashrama at Mayavati as the permanent home of *Prabuddha Bharata*.

The Journal is naturally grateful to the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati for providing it a home a hundred years ago, in March 1899, before when it was moving about as a wandering mendicant, and to commemorate the centenary of that memorable occasion this special issue is being brought out. The Ashrama too considers itself fortunate to provide a home for this Journal, which was always uppermost in the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda, for being an instrument for disseminating Vedantic thought throughout the world. The Swami, it must be noted, gave the Journal its beautiful and meaningful name. So it is very special.

In this issue the reader will find a narration of the Ashrama's history since inception and some of the memorable events of the early days of the Ashrama. There is a section dealing with reminiscences from the pen of a few gifted ex-inmates and visitors. There is, as in the previous years, an attractive section devoted to special articles from eminent writers covering a wide range of topics. It is our fervent hope that the reader will like the issue, illustrated as it is, and find himself/herself transported to this Himalayan habitat. Had he/she been here earlier, surely the reader will find many descriptions in this issue which will kindle pleasant memories of his/her stay here.

We record our gratefulness to Most Revered Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, the twelfth President of the Ramakrishna Order, for his enlightening message and benediction on this happy occasion. We are grateful too to Most Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Order, and Revered Swamis Gahananandaji Maharaj and Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order, for giving us their message. All these, we earnestly believe, will inspire the inmates, visitors, guests and well-wishers of the Ashrama.

We are thankful to the contributors of reminiscences and articles for the special issue. The former provide great insight into the different facets of the Ashrama. The articles throw much light on a wide range of topics. Every reader will find these very inspiring.

We are grateful to the advertisers who, despite the increase in the tariff rates, have supported the Journal in its humble endeavour. Without their help and cooperation it would not have been possible for us to maintain the quality of the Journal.

To the reviewers we have not sufficient words to express our gratefulness. Some of them have regularly contributed articles too, besides doing an excellent job of reviewing books for the Journal as a labour of love. We are also immensely grateful to the contributors of articles who have had to wait patiently to see their contribution in print in the other issues.

The reader would most certainly have seen the revised subscription rates which became effective from June 1998. This was unavoidable. We hope you would do all that is in your power to increase the size of the *Prabuddha Bharata* family. ❐

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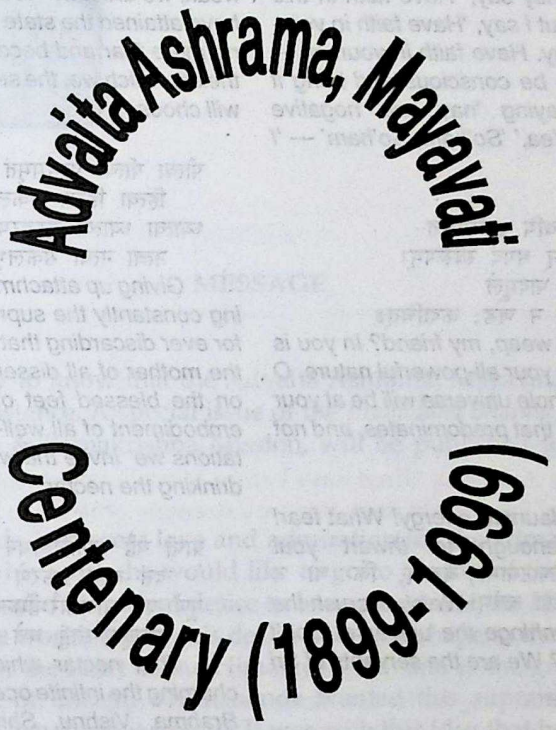

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'I Am He'

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Let people say whatever they like, stick to your own convictions, and rest assured, the world will be at your feet. They say, 'Have faith in this fellow or that fellow', but I say, 'Have faith in yourself first', that's the way. Have faith in yourself — all power is in you — be conscious and bring it out....Beware! No saying 'nay', no negative thoughts! Say, 'Yea, Yea,' 'So'ham, So'ham' — 'I am He! I am He!'

किन्नाम रोदिषि सखे त्वयि सर्वशक्ति-
रामन्त्रयस्व भगवन् भगदं स्वरूपम्।
त्रैलोक्यमेतदखिलं तव पादमूले
आत्मैव हि प्रभवते न जडः कदाचित्॥

What makes you weep, my friend? In you is all power. Summon up your all-powerful nature, O mighty one, and this whole universe will be at your feet. It is the Self alone that predominates, and not matter.

To work with undaunted energy! What fear! Who is powerful enough to thwart you! कुर्मस्तारकचर्वणं त्रिभुवनमुत्पाटयामो बलात्, किं भो न विजानास्यस्मान्, रामकृष्णदासा वयम्। *We shall crush the stars to atoms, and unhinge the universe. Don't you know who we are? We are the servants of Sri Ramakrishna.*

Fear? Whom to fear, forsooth?

क्षीणाः स्म दीनाः सकरुणा जल्पन्ति मूढा जना
नास्तिक्यन्त्विदन्तु अहह देहात्मवादातुराः।
प्राप्ता स्म वीरा गतभया अभयं प्रतिष्ठां यदा
आस्तिक्यन्त्विदन्तु चिनुमः रामकृष्णदासा वयम्॥

It is those foolish people who identify themselves with their bodies, that piteously cry, 'We are weak, we are low.' All this is atheism. Now that we have attained the state beyond fear, we shall have no more fear and become heroes. This indeed is theism which we, the servants of Sri Ramakrishna, will choose.

पीत्वा पीत्वा परममृतं वीतसंसाररागाः
हित्वा हित्वा सकलकलहप्राणिनीं स्वार्थसिद्धिम्।
ध्यात्वा ध्यात्वा गुरुवरपदं सर्वकल्याणरूपं
नत्वा नत्वा सकलभुवनं पातुमामन्त्रयामः॥

Giving up attachment for the world and drinking constantly the supreme nectar of immortality, for ever discarding that self-seeking spirit which is the mother of all dissension, and ever meditating on the blessed feet of our Guru which are the embodiment of all well-being, with repeated salutations we invite the whole world to participate in drinking the nectar.

प्राप्तं यद्वै त्वनादिनिधनं वेदोदधिं मथित्वा
दत्तं यस्य प्रकरणे हरिहरब्रह्मादिदेवैर्बलम्।
पूर्णं यत्तु प्राणसारैर्भोमनारायणानां
रामकृष्णस्तनुं धत्ते तत्पूर्णपात्रमिदं भोः॥

That nectar which has been obtained by churning the infinite ocean of the Vedas, into which Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and other gods have poured their strength, which is charged with the life-essence of the Avataras — God Incarnate on earth — Sri Ramakrishna holds that nectar in his person, in its fullest measure!

Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,
vol. 6, pp. 274–6

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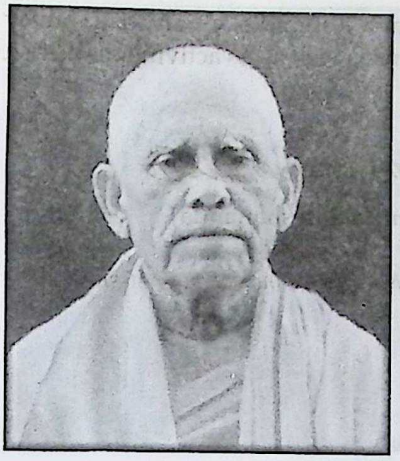

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02 August 1998

MESSAGE

It is a matter of joy to know that the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, has completed one hundred years of its existence. A special issue of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, an English organ of the Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, will be published to mark this glorious occasion.

Swami Vivekananda had great love and admiration for the Himalayas. How often he said that, giving up all his work, he would like to go to the lap of the Himalayas to sit in meditation there. It was also his ardent desire to have a centre at the Himalayas, away from the din and bustle of the world. It was this desire that took shape in the form of the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati in the heart of the Himalayas. Advaita is the greatest spiritual ideal humanity can conceive of. Swami Vivekananda wanted this supreme ideal to be made practical here so that all may benefit from it. It was with this idea that he made the Ashrama at Mayavati the home of Advaita. He wrote in a pamphlet on the Advaita Ashrama: 'To give this one truth a freer and fuller scope in elevating the lives of individuals and leavening the mass of mankind, we start this Advaita Ashrama on the Himalayan heights, the land of its first expiration.' It is well known how it has kept alive the spirit of Advaita during these last one hundred years. What with poor living conditions, the biting cold, the little food to eat and so on, the life at Mayavati has never been comfortable. In spite of all these, the Advaita Ashrama has been a source of inspiration to both monks and laity to struggle for Advaitic consciousness. It is a centre not meant only for *sadhana*, but also is the home of some of the greatest publications of the Ramakrishna Movement, including the monthly journal, *Prabuddha Bharata*, which has completed 100 years recently. Thus, the Advaita Ashrama has a unique distinction in the annals of the Ramakrishna Movement and I hope that in the years to come, it will grow in strength to be a centre of the grandest truth of learning and spirituality. Swami Vivekananda's dream that the world will find inspiration for the highest truths of Vedanta from here may be fulfilled, is my prayer.

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On this joyous occasion of the Centenary of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, I convey my hearty best wishes to everyone associated with the centre as well as its activities and wish the special issue of the *Prabuddha Bharata* a grand success.

Swami Bhuteshananda

(Swami Bhuteshananda)
President
Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission

This message by Most Revered Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, twelfth President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, was sent to Revered Swami Mumukshanandaji Maharaj, President of Advaita Ashrama, three days before Most Revered Maharaj went to the hospital for the last time. We are extremely grateful to Most Revered Maharaj for this valuable message.

Most Revered Maharaj was exceedingly happy to see the figure 100 on the cover of the Centenary Issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* brought out in 1995, when a copy of it was presented to him. He said, 'hundred', with great joy. Pointing to the first floor northern verandah of the Ashrama in the picture he said, '[The snow ranges] look grand from here.' It is a matter of great regret that Most Revered Maharaj, who had a special love for the Ashrama and its publications including the *Prabuddha Bharata*, entered *mahasamadhi* on 10 August 1998.

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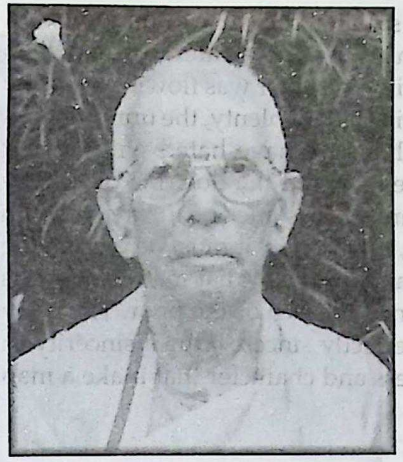

Ramakrishna Math
Ramakrishna Math Marg
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Hyderabad - 500 029

7 September 1998

MESSAGE

The Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, in the heart of the Himalayas, is celebrating its Centenary in 1999. Swami Vivekananda strongly wished it to be a unique institution meant to cultivate and uphold Advaita and Advaita alone. What is this Advaita?

Gauḍapāda, Ādi Śaṅkarācārya's teacher's teacher, expounds this in one great verse in his *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad Kārikā* (4.2):

Asparśa-yogo vai nāma sarva-sattva-sukho hitaḥ;
Avivādo-aviruddhaśca deśitas-taṁ namāmyaham.

'I salute this well-known yoga of non-duality dedicated to the happiness and welfare of all beings and which is free from all disputation and contradiction.'

This Mount Everest of Advaita philosophy and spirituality is what has held India together, in spite of her many diverse mutually quarreling religious sects, ethnic groups, and languages, and in spite of its long political subjection. It is this Advaita that has inspired and enabled India to successfully adopt a policy of unity in diversity, instead of a policy of uniformity which all dualistic religions follow.

Swami Vivekananda wanted India to hold fast to this Advaitic vision and strengthen it in the modern period. Strongly presenting this truth, Swamiji said in his 1897 Lahore lecture on 'The Vedanta' (*The Complete Works*, vol. 3, pp. 430–1):

Therefore, young men of Lahore, raise once more that mighty banner of Advaita, for on no other ground can you have that wonderful love until you see that the same Lord is present everywhere. Unfurl that banner of love! 'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.' Arise, arise once more, for nothing can be done without renunciation. If you want

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to help others, your little self must go. ... The nation is sinking, the curse of unnumbered millions is on our heads — those to whom we have been giving ditch-water to drink when they have been dying of thirst and while the perennial river of water was flowing past, the unnumbered millions whom we have allowed to starve in sight of plenty, the unnumbered millions to whom we have talked of Advaita and whom we have hated with all our strength, the unnumbered millions for whom we have invented the doctrine of *lokācāra* (usage), to whom we have talked theoretically that we are all the same and all are one with the same Lord, without even an ounce of practice. 'Yet, my friends, it must be only in the mind and never in practice!' Wipe off this blot. 'Arise and awake.' What matters it if this little life goes? Everyone has to die, the saint or the sinner, the rich or the poor. The body never remains for anyone. Arise and awake and be perfectly sincere. Our insincerity in India is awful; what we want is character, that steadiness and character that make a man cling on to a thing like grim death.

Concluding that lecture, Swamiji said (Ibid., p. 433):

For in the West the old order of things is vanishing, giving way to a new order of things, which is the worship of gold, the worship of Mammon. ... No nation, however strong, can stand on such foundations, and the history of the world tells us that all that had such foundations are dead and gone. In the first place we have to stop the incoming of such a wave in India. Therefore preach the Advaita to every one, so that religion may withstand the shock of modern science....

It is this Advaitic vision and action that will promote national integration as well as global unity.

The Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, was meant by Swamiji to be a centre to uphold this Advaita philosophy and spirituality in its pure form for the good of India and the world.

Ranganathananda

(Swami Ranganathananda)
President
Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

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Ramakrishna Math
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September 17, 1998

CENTENARY OF THE ADVAITA ASHRAMA, MAYAVATI
MESSAGE

I am glad to know that the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, is going to celebrate the Centenary of its founding and that the January 1999 number of *Prabuddha Bharata* will be a special issue in commemoration of this event.

The founding of the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati is a landmark event in the annals of the Ramakrishna Movement. It is the first monastic institution of its kind which does not allow any form of ritualistic worship on its premises, not even the worship of Shiva which is normally done in traditional Advaita monasteries. It is the first monastic institution in India founded with the financial assistance of Western devotees who became its members. It is administered by a separate Board of Trustees, although the members of this Board are all members of the Ramakrishna Order.

What were the considerations that prompted Swamiji to start this unique institution? It is said that the idea of starting it occurred to him for the first time when he was travelling on the Alps in Switzerland. Apart from his own love for the Himalayas and the natural inclination of his mind to solitude and contemplation, Swamiji wanted to have a place where his Western disciples could have protection from the oppressive heat of the plains. Above all, Swamiji wanted to recover the pristine purity of Advaita and make it a living force without the support of dualistic concepts and practices.

Swamiji himself set forth the aim of starting the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati in the following lines: 'The Advaita is the only system which gives unto man complete possession of himself, takes off all dependence and its associated superstitions, thus making us brave to suffer, brave to do, and in the long run attain to Absolute Freedom. Hitherto it has not been possible to preach this Noble Truth entirely free from the settings of dualistic weakness; this alone, we are convinced, explains why it has not been more operative and useful to mankind

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at large. To give this ONE TRUTH a freer and fuller scope in elevating the lives of individuals and leavening the mass of mankind, we start this Advaita Ashrama on the Himalayan heights, the land of its first expiration.'

A hundred years have passed since Mayavati Advaita Ashrama came into existence. During this period humanity has made giant strides in the field of science and technology. But rational thinking has eroded the foundations of religious faith and morality especially in the West. Many people now find that they can no longer believe in a personal Deity, in divine dispensation and other dogmatic assertions of traditional religions. This has led to the break-down of family life and the widespread prevalence of loneliness, meaninglessness, anxiety, violence and other problems in the present-day society.

It is obvious that modern man needs a view of life and Reality that can fulfil his spiritual aspirations and also meet the challenges of science and rational thinking. This is precisely what the Advaita system as interpreted by Swami Vivekananda provides. While dualistic systems of religious faith and scientific concepts deal with objective reality, Advaita goes directly to the subjective reality, the true Self of man whose existence is self-evident, and reveals the oneness of this Self with the Supreme Self, the ultimate Reality behind the universe. This truth of the oneness of all selves provides an immutable spiritual foundation to all nobler forms of human relationships such as love, compassion and morality.

Advaita, however, is not a mere mental attitude or intellectual concept. As Swamiji has repeatedly pointed out, 'Religion is realization, not mere talk.' The truth of the non-dual nature of the ultimate Reality is to be realized through direct experience. The ancient sages of India attained this experience through deep contemplation. Contemplation is the attunement of the mind to the natural silence and stillness that pervade all existence. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (7.6.1) says, 'The earth appears as if rapt in contemplation; the sky appears as if rapt in contemplation; the heaven appears as if rapt in contemplation; the waters appear as if rapt in contemplation; the mountains appear as if rapt in contemplation; gods and humans appear as if rapt in contemplation.' One can actually experience this truth in the forest retreat of Mayavati. That is why Swamiji wanted to spend his last days in contemplation at Mayavati. Even now we can feel the spirit of Vivekananda enveloping the whole place like the light of an eternal dawn.

May the celebration of the Centenary of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, inspire people everywhere to hearken to Swamiji's unceasing call: 'Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!'

Swami Gahanananda

(Swami Gahanananda)
Vice-President
Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

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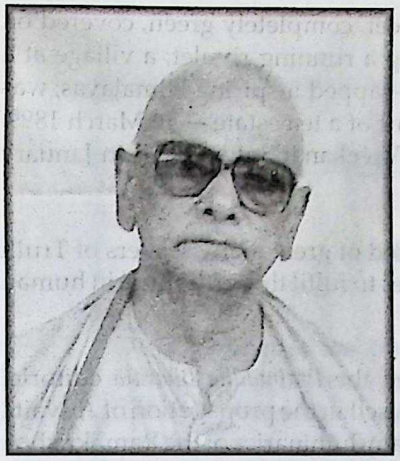

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7 September 1998

MESSAGE

Centuries of exploitation and slavery debased the Indians. As a result, Aryan culture was on the verge of getting uprooted. Swami Vivekananda, the awakener of the soul of man, therefore, gave his clarion call to all mankind, in particular Indians, to 'arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached'. Indians must arise for a rejuvenated India will alone be able to preserve the glories and lofty heritage of the nation and broadcast the same the world over calling on man to strive for freedom from the fetters of false identity. That was one of the great promises for which the Nara-Nārāyaṇa, the Nara-ṛṣi, the Nara-sakhā, Narendranath visited the earth.

Prabuddha Bharata is to accomplish this lofty mission through its pages, calling on man, at home and abroad, to become aware of the treasure-chest within him.

True, India has since then attained political freedom. But that is just the beginning of the awakening. Now is the time when greater attention is to be given to the dissemination of the Eternal Values India achieved in the past, for the global welfare of man. So, *Prabuddha Bharata* has now an even greater responsibility to guide humanity in a world rendered almost crazy by the unbelievable, glamorous achievements of science and technology, which after all concerns only the temporal. *Prabuddha Bharata* has to bless man with the Eternal which alone is fulfilment. So, *Prabuddha Bharata* has to spread the message of awakening and onward march more vigorously now than ever before until mankind as a whole awakes and marches towards illumination. Many more busy centuries are looking forward to the *Prabuddha Bharata*.

However, the *Prabuddha Bharata*, a few years after its first appearance, was like an itinerant monk. This was, of course, a great problem then. Fortunately, some of Swamiji's western disciples, specially Capt. J.H. Sevier and Mrs. Sevier, who were determined to follow Swamiji to India, needed a retreat centre for Advaita Sādhanā as taught by their master, preferably in the cool and quiet of the Himalayas. So, finally, 810 *nalis* (roughly 41 acres) of forest land in

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the bosom of the Himalayas at an altitude of about 6800 feet, completely green, covered on three sides by huge mountains, with one side overlooking a running rivulet, a village at a distance, and at the horizon, in a crescent shape, the snow-capped inspiring Himalayas, was purchased with a house and one or two huts thereon — part of a tea estate — in March 1899. The Mayavati Advaita Ashrama was established. Swami Vivekananda visited it in January 1901 and sanctified it by his stay of fifteen days.

Mayavati (Maipata, the original name) fulfilled the need of great many seekers of Truth — specially those who chose to practise Advaita. It continues to fulfil this great urge in human hearts.

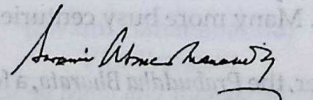
Secondly, Mayavati Advaita Ashrama, finally housed the *Prabuddha Bharata* editorial office. Its Publication Department in Calcutta now engages itself in the propagation of Advaita Vedanta and the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Many luminaries of the Ramakrishna Order lived and worked at Mayavati and its Calcutta branch.

In fact, there are not many places on the face of the earth like Mayavati, for intense spiritual practice. The perfect silence in and around the Ashrama cut off as it is from all noisy localities, the whisper of the wind through the leaves of the pines, oaks and deodars, mingled with the sweet melody of the chirping of birds, though sometimes disturbed by the roars of tigers or the cries of barking deer or stags, naturally has a very deep effect on inward minds — so helpful for deeper spiritual practice and concentrated literary work to propagate Vedantic truth.

There has never been a crowd of even monks and devotees at Mayavati. Generally, some six monks live there. And they live a wonderfully punctuated life of work and worship. It is true that there are hours when a visitor would feel as if there was no living being there. These are the hours for spiritual practice — meditation. Isn't it wonderful! And then to be in Swarupanandaji's *kutia!* Grand!

The Mother's Bungalow and the Guest House have been housing eminent, sincere people of the East and the West who visit Mayavati seeking Truth. The whole place has an extraordinary spiritual charm. None can escape its subtle and sublime influence if one but stays there even for a few days.

As such Mayavati Advaita Ashrama has to continue for centuries ahead fulfilling the highest spiritual aspiration of man and propagating the great message of Practical Advaita as demonstrated in the lives and teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. It has been a great spiritual fountain for the past one hundred years and may it remain so for many more years to come.



(Swami Atmasthananda)
Vice-President
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Advaita Ashrama: The Prospectus

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

In Whom is the Universe, Who is in the Universe, Who is the Universe; in Whom is the Soul, Who is in the Soul, Who is the Soul of Man; knowing Him — and therefore the Universe — as our Self, alone extinguishes all fear, brings an end to misery and leads to Infinite Freedom. Wherever there has been expansion in love or progress in well-being, of individuals or numbers, it has been through the perception, realisation, and the practicalisation of the Eternal Truth — THE ONENESS OF ALL BEINGS. 'Dependence is misery. Independence is happiness.' The Advaita is the only system which gives unto man complete possession of himself, takes off all dependence and its associated superstitions, thus making us brave to suffer, brave to do, and in the long run attain to Absolute Freedom.

Hitherto it has not been possible to preach this Noble Truth entirely free from the settings of dualistic weakness; this alone, we are convinced, explains why it has not been more operative and useful to mankind at large.

To give this ONE TRUTH a freer and fuller scope in elevating the lives of individuals and leavening the mass of mankind, we start this Advaita Ashrama on the Himalayan heights, the land of its first expiration.

Here it is hoped to keep Advaita free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations. Here will be taught and practised nothing but the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple; and though in entire sympathy with all other systems, this Ashrama is dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone.

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Prabuddha Bharata, June 1900, pp. 83–4

The Advaita Ashrama

A Few Explanatory Words

This may be said to constitute the commentary on the Prospectus of the Advaita Ashrama. With very small changes as required due to changing times, the practices enunciated hereunder are followed to this day. However, the central guiding principle is kept intact.

The Ashrama aims at helping with its best might, such men as sincerely long for a life truly suited for the culture of the deep spiritual instincts abiding in the human heart. While believing naturally in the elevating power of all systems of religion and allowing its members full liberty to choose and follow their own ways of *upasana*, the Philosophy of Advaita — which derives its support not only from the simple unequivocal text of the *Srutis* but also from the results of modern scientific research — forms the basic principle of its thought and action. And education which is nothing more or less than the unfoldment of the within, is accordingly, in keeping with the Advaita view-point, imparted more by assisting each member to think out for himself from, and adjust himself in his own way to, the facts of *Being* and *Existence* than by pressing upon him the opinions formed by others, thus gently leading him to develop and harmonize, to the fullest extent and satisfaction of his heart and reason, his individual ways of thought with conclusions directly deducible from the Advaita.

Those who struggle to be entirely free from sensual appetites are capable of walking on the path, 'sharp like the edge of a razor and pronounced extremely difficult by the wise.' The Ashrama, therefore, lays down, as the first condition for membership, the rule that every member should take the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. This excludes all those who have not that longing for spirituality which ever delights in the freedom of renunciation. It also precludes the possibility of the members having to bear their own expenses of living in the Ashrama.

Love and sympathy unite man with man and unconsciously lead him to the realization of his kinship with all. Hatred and jealousy widen the gap of separation and bar the way to true knowledge. The two following rules, therefore, enjoin upon every one of the members to give that respect and toleration to the habits and religious opinions of others, which he would, they should accord to his, and to practise in daily life his belief in the Brotherhood of man and the Selfhood of all.

Now, as everything depends upon a strong physique, and as a good climate and moderate exercise almost ensure it to those whose habits are regulated by strict discipline, the Ashrama deems it wise to have some of its manual work done by the members. This will not only make them strong and healthy and, to some extent, independent of outside help, but will advance the growth of fellow-feeling and sympathy among its members by making them thus minister to one another's needs and comforts. It will also prove a great preventive against that sloth and inactivity which often makes its way into such bodies in the garb of meditative stillness.

Study would form another important and necessary occupation of the members. The usefulness of discriminative study in an institution of this character cannot be too

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much emphasized. It prevents the spirit of religion from lapsing into dead formalities and weakening superstitions, by bringing the touchstone of a refined understanding to bear upon whatever comes in its garb and lifts the mind pleasantly and unconsciously from the sense-plane to the region illumined with exalted thought. The subject of study will, of course, be made as far as possible, to agree with the intellectual capacity of individual members. But the Upanishads, the six systems of Vedic Philosophy and the chief philosophical and metaphysical works of Western thinkers, will constitute the fixed course of study for members having a fair knowledge of Sanskrit and English. For students of lesser literary capacities, such books will be chosen as will make them acquainted with the general principles of these philosophical systems, by means of simple lessons. Members whose aptitude for study is meagre and who would therefore prefer to attend, in the hours of study, to the manual work of the Ashrama need not join the classes.

The last, though not the least object to be particularly attended to by the members of the Advaita Ashrama, is Yoga. This is the channel through which the energy acquired by judiciously following the disciplinary methods indicated above, should be directed in order that they may lead up to the highest point of spiritual evolution and ground the character firmly on the adamantine rock of conviction, gained through practical experience of spiritual truths.

Those Sannyasin members of the Ashrama who can give satisfactory testimony of their abilities — physical, intellectual and spiritual — to take the responsible position of teachers, will be sent out to teach what they themselves have learnt by study, meditation and Yoga. 'Example is better than precept,' and the Ashrama will always look to the all-sided development of the members as its sole concern, rather than seek to swell its body by indiscriminate admission.

But as the Advaita Ashrama believes that a single day spent in religious discipline in the company of men leading a higher life, may leave impressions capable of proving a tower of strength in trying circumstances, it will gladly admit members who have a mind to take up the householder's life, after making them, to some extent, fit for its heavy responsibilities, by receiving some training in the Ashrama. It should be clearly understood that during the period of training, these members will have to abide strictly by the rules stated above.

No one, as a rule, will be initiated into Sannyasa* before the completion of at least twelve months of Brahmacharya at the Ashrama. But the Ashrama and every one of its members will have perfect liberty to part with each other whenever they think such a course advisable, after due consideration.

[Our contemporaries who kindly noticed the Prospectus of the Advaita Ashrama when it was issued, are requested to do us the same favour in respect to the above.

— Swami Swarupananda, *Ed.*]

* At present ordination into Brahmacharya/Sannyasa is decided by the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order at Belur. — *Ed.*

यस्मिन्निदं यतश्चेदं येनेदं य इदं स्वयम्।
योऽस्मात् परस्माच्च परस्तं प्रपद्ये स्वयम्भुवम्॥

I seek shelter in that eternally existent One from whom this universe has come, in whom it subsists, who is its instrumental cause, of whom it is a manifestation, and who at the same time transcends that world-manifestation both in the causal and the effect conditions. —Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 8.3.3

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Prabuddha Bharata, July 1905, pp. 128–30

Advaita and the Advaita Ashrama

AN INMATE FROM SOUTHERN INDIA

Arise! Awake! and reaching the worthy teachers, learn. For the way, say the sages, is sharp like the edge of a razor and hard to cross. — Katha Upanishad

'Revered Sir, I am sorrowing. Take me across the ocean of grief.' This agonizing cry of a distressed soul approaching the teacher, comes to us from the far-off ages, recorded in one of the oldest Upanishads, the *Chhandogya*.

Today, the world is richer with the experience of more than a thousand years and yet man is none the happier nor nearer the solace of the spirit than his remote ancestor. Hundreds of prophets and sages have brought tidings of a Peace of which their own soul was full. 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,' so preached the Christ. 'Leave all questions of duty and non-duty, and seek shelter with Me. I will deliver you from all evil. Do not grieve,' so said Sri Krishna. The Buddha also brought the message of the Peace of Nirvana through Renunciation and an unbounded Love to others. So did a host of others, each according to his own measure.

But Peace and Good-will on earth are as far off as ever. On the other hand, the cold white light of modern science and thought is mercilessly showing up the grotesqueness, childishness or baselessness as the case may be, of many of the stoutest and dearest consolations and beliefs of the past, and revealing in the inmost recesses of the human heart, the presence of many a germ of weakness, superstition and disease, which manifest as part of human nature and escape from which appears impossible. The thoughtful man may well stand aghast at the odds against him. When such is the inner desolation of the heart, the questions of life and death, are daily pressing more and more to the front and demanding a satisfactory solution.

Lest, borne on the hurrying waters of the workaday world, we be tossed up and down by the waves of pleasure and grief, lest, in the rapidity of the march of events, we, in the weakness of our ignorance, should lag behind, it is necessary to take a strong central position, whence we can reconcile ourselves to all the contrasts and divergences of our surroundings, and whence we can keep ourselves in touch with and be abreast of the times.

In vain shall we seek in the West for such a *point d'appui*, neither the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers nor the modern metaphysicians are able to supply us with such a synthesis. The verdict of Western thought, both ancient and modern, may very well be summed up in the words of Mathew Arnold, the apostle of 'Sweetness and Light,' and the fairest representative of what was best and highest in the life and thought of the Europe of the Nineteenth Century: 'Calm is not life's crown, though calm is well.'

When such is the despair of the West, the East, which has ever been the land of religion and philosophy, boldly proclaims through the Upanishads that the Peace, which the prophets found, can be obtained here *in this life*, and is the birth-right of every human

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being. In these Upanishads we meet with such passages as शान्तं शिवं '(This Self is) all Peace and Good,' शान्तमभयं ब्रह्म 'The Brahman is all Peace and Freedom from fear,' भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिश्छिद्यन्ते सर्वसंशया:। क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन्दृष्टे परावरे॥ 'The bond of the heart is cut asunder, all doubts are solved, all his actions lose their binding effects, when that lower and higher is seen.' And also such passages as इह चेदवेदीदथ सत्यमस्ति न चेदिहावेदीन्महती विनष्टि: 'If one knows the Self here in this very life, it is well; if not, there befalls a great calamity,' अभयं वै प्राप्तोऽसि जनक: 'O Janaka, thou hast indeed attained the Fearless One.'

Built on the rock of experience of the ancient Rishis as revealed in the Upanishads, the Advaita Vedanta is the highest pinnacle of human thought and stands for the realization of Brahmavidya here in this life. Tearing off the veil of inequality and difference, it reveals the divinity of all nature, the solidarity of all life and the nobility of all its aspirations. It is the synthesis of all thought, of all creeds and of all faiths and therefore opposed to none. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, 'The Advaita is the only system which gives unto man complete possession of himself, takes off all dependence and its associated superstitions, thus making us brave to suffer, brave to do, and in the long run attain to Absolute Freedom.'

But what with the ignorance and selfishness of the few who monopolized all higher learning in India, and what with the consequent narrowing of its ideal, the Advaita Vedanta has not hitherto been able to leaven mankind as it should. To live up to the ideal of Advaita Vedanta: to fuse all the distinctions of race, colour, caste, class, creed and sect, into the unity of supreme selfless love, based not on sentiment or imagination, but on the rational and spiritual perception of the unity and divinity of all existence, is the only means to permanently alleviate human misery and to ensure human progress.

'To give this truth, a freer and fuller scope in elevating the lives of individuals and leavening the mass of mankind, the Advaita Ashrama was established in Mayavati on the Himalayan heights, under the guidance of the Swami Vivekananda. 'Here it is hoped to keep Advaita free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations. Here will be taught and practised nothing but the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple; and though in entire sympathy with all other systems, this Ashrama is dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone' — thus runs the Prospectus of the Ashrama, inviting the co-operation of all to help make the institution effective in carrying out its noble aim.

The two main objects of the Ashrama are the study and culture of Advaita by its members at home and abroad and secondly, admission and training of Brahmacharins and Sannyasins to carry the Gospel of Advaita to all men in all lands.

Admission is free and open to all without distinction of caste, class, race, or creed. Those who giving up all private concerns, desire to devote themselves exclusively to self-improvement and furtherance of the objects of the Ashrama according to the constitution of the Ashrama are admitted as inmates. After a period of training which will be determined by the committee of Trustees of the Ashrama in each case, inmates will be admitted to the membership of the Ashrama.

The most important of the General Rules of the Ashrama which will apply to both the inmates and the members are:

1. No external worship of images, pictures &c., shall be practised nor any ritual except the Viraja Homa shall be performed in the Ashrama.
2. *Sādhanā* should consist of *Japam* or *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* and study and work in some department or other of the Ashrama.

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3. Taking their stand on Advaita and making it the goal of their teaching, members should think and speak respectfully of other systems of philosophy and religion.

A copy of the Rules of the Ashrama together with Application Form can be had on application to the Manager, Prabuddha Bharata, Lohaghat P.O., Almora.*

India today is in transition from a long continued sleep to a slow awakening. It is the duty of all who have the interest of spiritual freedom at heart and who believe in the spiritual genius of Hinduism, to combine and make a joint effort towards the furtherance of the cause of spirituality. The Advaita Ashrama offers a nucleus of such an organization. It inculcates the spirit of self-sacrifice and intense activity and it believes in an all-round growth of character. But institutions depend upon men.

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* The current practice is to write to the President, Advaita Ashrama, either at P.O. Mayavati, via Lohaghat, Dt. Champavat, PIN 262 524, U.P., or at 5 Dehi Entally Road, Calcutta, PIN 700 014, W. Bengal, for information—*Ed.*

1914: In front of the Prabuddha Bharata building:
Back row, standing centre, Swami Prajnananda; Middle row, standing left, Swami Virajananda; second from right, Swami Abhayananda.

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EDITORIAL

The Message of Mayavati

The Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati crosses a milestone: it completes a hundred years this year. The *Prabuddha Bharata* pays its respectful homage to this Ashrama, which has sheltered and nurtured it all through. This special issue is dedicated to the Advaita Ashrama.

The Inception Story

Swami Vivekananda had great love and admiration for the Himalayas. It was Swamiji's ardent desire to establish a monastery there. The Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati is his dream come true. After the passing on of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji also took to wandering as many other brother disciples of his did. Though he wanted to go to the Himalayas, he could not do so as early as he wished to. Various difficulties came in his way. In his letter dated 6 July 1890 to Sri Pramadadas Mitra, the elderly scholar-friend of Swamiji, the latter wrote: 'I am longing for a flight to the Himalayas.'[1] During his wanderings, he went to the Himalayas no doubt, but could not settle down there, however much he might have desired to do so. Providence had other plans for him.

'I was never a *missionary*, nor ever would be one — my place is in the Himalayas,'[2] wrote Swamiji in May 1894 to Prof. J.H. Wright, whom he affectionately called 'Adhyapakji'. We see him writing to the Hale sisters on 26 July 1894: 'Miss Phillips has a beautiful place somewhere in the N.Y. state — mountain .... I am going to make a Himalayas there and start a monastery.'[3] This was probably his first written expression of the desire to found a monastery in the Himalayas, though worded otherwise. In August 1896, Swamiji went to Switzerland from London along with his admirers, the Seviers. Captain James Henry Sevier and Mrs. Charlotte Elizabeth Sevier were a pious English couple who, having heard the glory of Vedanta from Swamiji, had decided to come with him to India. In fact, during his very first private interview with them, Swamiji had asked 'Mother' Sevier, for that was how he addressed her: 'Would you not like to come to India? I will give you of my best realizations.'[4] While staying amidst the snowy Alps of Switzerland, which reminded him of the Himalayas, Swamiji's desire for a centre in the Himalayas must have become stronger. Having known that a few of his Western disciples, specially the Seviers, were keen to dedicate their lives to Vedanta, he wished that a centre was to be established for their stay somewhere near Almora, about 7000 feet above sea level to make their stay comfortable. So, in a letter to his friend, Lala Badri Sah of Almora, Swamiji wrote that he desired to purchase a bungalow with gardens around somewhere in or near Almora. Later, in November 1896, he reminded him about the purchase and added that he wanted a 'whole hill'. Now, probably the prophet in him understood that though he desired much, he might not be able to make it to the Himalayas for longer stays there in future. So, it was at the Himalayas of Europe that he satisfied the Seviers with his constant presence. As promised to Mother

1. Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1993), vol. 1, p. 241. [Hereafter, *Life*.]
2. *Life*, vol. 1, p. 487.
3. Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1959), vol. 8, p. 317. [Hereafter, CW.]
4. *Life*, vol. 2, p. 113.

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Sevier, he was at his best in Saas-Fee (Switzerland), where he spent 'some of the most luminous spiritual moments of his life'.[5] Before starting for the Alps, he had written to the Hale sisters: 'I expect to go to India with some English friends who are going to live in my monastery there, which by the by is in the air yet. It is struggling to materialize somewhere in the Himalayas.'[6] Later on, in his lecture at Almora, Swami Vivekananda expressed a desire to spend his final days in the Himalayas.

Swamiji returned to India, accompanied by the Seviers among others, to be received by his motherland with great enthusiasm. The Seviers soon left for Almora where they stayed at the Thompson House, which was rented for their use. Meanwhile, Sri B.R. Rajam Iyer, who was the first Editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata,* passed away in Madras. The publication of the journal had therefore to be discontinued from Madras. It came as a rude shock to Swamiji, who had also arrived at Almora by that time. He told Mr. Sevier that the couple's intention to serve India could take the form of their running the journal from the Himalayas. Thus, the Thompson House became the second home of the *Prabuddha Bharata.* Mr. Sevier acted as Manager and Swami Swarupananda became the first monastic Editor. Next, the Seviers toured Almora District extensively with Swami Swarupananda, looking for a proper place for the proposed Himalayan Ashrama. It is thus that they came upon the estate of Mayavati. With the hearty blessings of Swamiji, the Seviers purchased the land, which had been a tea garden before. Soon, the *Prabuddha Bharata* office was shifted over to that place. The Advaita Ashrama was ultimately inaugurated on 19 March 1899, the day on which the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was publicly celebrated that year.[7] Swamiji sent a letter in March 1899 to the joint-founders of the Ashrama [Swami Swarupananda], in which he wrote in part:

> The Advaita is the only system which gives unto man complete possession of himself, takes off all dependence and its associated superstitions, thus making us brave to suffer, brave to do, and in the long run attain to Absolute Freedom.... Here it is hoped to keep Advaita free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations.... This Ashrama is dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone.[8]

From then on began the saga of hardship and of hard work, until Mr. Sevier succumbed to austerities a year later. Mrs. Sevier left India for good seventeen years later. The monastics have been running the Ashrama since then through thick and thin.

Swamiji's love for the Himalayas grew with the passing of days. He had written to Swami Brahmananda on 21 November 1899: 'I am going to the Himalayas soon to retire for ever.' Again, to Mary Hale, he wrote on 17 June 1900: 'So much of optimism has come to me, Mary, that I should fly off to the Himalayas if I had wings.'[9]

Advaita Alone

After his second tour of the West, Swamiji came back to India on 9 December 1900. He had returned hastily only because of his premonition that Captain Sevier was seriously ill. Unfortunately, Captain Sevier passed away even before Swamiji reached India. Pained at the news, the latter instantly decided to leave for Mayavati from Belur Math to console Mrs. Sevier. His visit to Mayavati (beginning 3 January 1901) is an interesting chapter in his life story. For one, Swamiji was extremely happy that his desire to have a monastery in the Himalayas had come true. For another, he was sad that the 'cause has already two European martyrs' (the other being J.J. Goodwin). During his stay for a fortnight there, on the one hand

5. *Life,* vol. 2, p. 118.
6. *Life,* vol. 2, p. 117.
7. *Life,* vol. 2, pp. 431–2.
8. *Life,* vol. 2, p. 432.
9. *CW,* vol. 8, p. 524.

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Swamiji was impressed by the Ashrama and its activities but on the other, he was surprised to see ritualism entering the Advaita Ashrama also. Swamiji strongly disapproved of it one evening when all were gathered about the fireplace. However, he did not ask the ashramites to remove the little shrine they had arranged so as not to hurt their sentiments. But, those who had introduced the services themselves gave the practice up about a year later. Later on, when a young monk 'complained' through correspondence to the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, about not being able to practise dualistic form of worship at Mayavati, the Mother's emphatic reply came: 'One who is our guru (Sri Ramakrishna), he is Advaita. Since you all are his disciples, you too are Advaitins.'[10] That put an end to any doubt that anyone might have had regarding the ideals of the Advaita Ashrama. Swami Vivekananda's explicit advice to the monks of Mayavati was as follows:[11]

> [At Mayavati,] attention was to be paid only to the subjective side of religion such as meditation, individual and collective study of scriptures, and the practice and the teaching of the highest spiritual monism, free from any dualistic weakness or dependence.

The Idea of Advaita

God (Brahman), the universe (*jagat*) and the living being (*jiva*) — these are the three entities which concern all metaphysical inquiry. All philosophy centres around these three entities — their reality or unreality, their mutual relationships, ways of knowing them, and so on. Vedanta has three main streams and many sub-streams, all depending upon the differences of opinion regarding these three entities alone. Of the major streams of Vedanta, Dualism (Dvaita), regards all the three above entities as true, eternal and separate from one another. Qualified Non-Dualism (Viśiṣṭādvaita) regards the last two as real, only as the qualifications of the first. That means, *jagat* and *jiva* are real insofar as they are qualifications of Brahman. Finally, according to Non-Dualism (Advaita), both *jiva* and *jagat* are illusory. Only Brahman is real and eternal. Thus, as Sri Ramakrishna used to repeatedly say, Advaita means Brahman alone is real and everything else is unreal.

Swami Vivekananda says: 'All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita and Advaita; one comes after the other. ... Now, by religion is meant Vedanta.'[12] The Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati is dedicated to the propagation of this highest religion.

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Is Religion Practical?

The next point is utility. If Advaita is the highest type of religion and if religion is nothing but Vedanta alone, what is the use of it? 'Religion, to help mankind, must be ready and able to help him in whatever condition he is, in servitude or in freedom, in the depths of degradation or on the heights of purity; everywhere, equally, it should be able to come to his aid. The principles of Vedanta, or the ideal of religion, or whatever you may call it, will be fulfilled by its capacity for performing this great function,' says Swamiji.[13]

All through his life, one of the important questions that Swamiji thought over was, how to make religion practicable in day-to-day life. That is, he wanted to build a bridge between the life of the world and the highest religious principles. He wanted that the 'fictitious differentiation between religion and the life of the world must vanish'.[14] Swamiji had first-hand experience of the religion that was practised in India during those days. During his wanderings he had come in close touch with the religious practices of Indians. The religious history of India is colourful indeed.

10. *Life*, vol. 2, p. 572.
11. *Life*, vol. 2, p. 571.
12. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 81-2.
13. *CW*, vol. 2, pp. 300–01.
14. *CW*, vol. 2, p. 291.

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All life in India is centred around religion. Now, the religion of the common masses consisted only of rituals — most of them having very little meaning. Ritualistic practices having continued for centuries and mythological stories having grown in abundance, the variety in religion had increased to astounding proportions and thus, social differences were widening with the passing of time. There were saints and sages from time to time who showed the correct path. But, the situation remained almost the same. While the highest ideal of Advaita was propounded in this very land, the common masses were simply left out of consideration. Consequently, the real India, which is the masses, suffered on all fronts. For the select few, religion meant only discussing about God, worshipping Him in various forms without a clear idea that He can be seen and realized, and following several man-made rules at the cost of fellow beings. That was India and its religion in practice.

It is an age-old truth that unity brings strength while divisions cause weakness. Even with the knowledge of oneness, Advaita, being here for a thousand years and more, the land had not found out a way to unite people, at least at the gross level. Disunity caused mutual hatred and the result was weakness. Just as a weak body is easily prone to ailments, this weak race succumbed helplessly to various external influences. Foreign rule, alien cultures, atheism, poverty, disease — the list of 'infections' grew. Not that reformers were not trying hard to improve the situation — only they could not go to the root of the problem.

While the situation in India till the advent of Vivekananda was this, the scenario in many other nations of the world was of a different nature. When Swamiji went to the West, he witnessed grandeur at the physical level. The power of organization, education, social harmony, progress of women — all such things were too evident there. With all the glory of Western social structure, however, there was something lacking. Though there was wealth and material comfort, there were the problems of loneliness and meaninglessness for want of higher ideals. These problems had led to several complexities and disharmony, thereby causing unhappiness in the minds of those people.

Thus, the East and the West, both had problems. 'My God, I saw terrible misery amongst my brethren; I searched and discovered a way out of it.'[15] Instead of suggesting some odd solutions to problems, Swamiji went deeper. He had always sought a single, lasting cure for all illnesses. Now, he discovered that Vedanta was the answer to the problems of both the West and the East. Secondly, Swamiji also understood that no individual or culture can survive in isolation. There should be harmony or oneness, and that comes from living for a higher ideal. Here again, Vedanta comes in.

A religion which was to help humanity in all respects was confined to books, and only the non-essentials were being practised. Swamiji came and changed the situation.

The Path to Perfection

The fundamental principle of Vedanta is the idea of the Self (Atman). Beyond the body, beyond the mind, there is the eternal Self, which is the repository of all powers, declare the scriptures. Swami Vivekananda said that to dwell upon weakness is not the remedy for weakness. Again, to dwell upon human failings is not the solution to the problem of human failings. So, he taught the positive truth — the glory of the Atman. 'The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us,'[16] he declared. The very faith that we have infinite power within us brings [to] us tremendous strength. Through the cultivation of faith in ourselves, our weakness will go away slowly and we shall grow stronger and stronger day by day. Swamiji asserts that if matter is powerful, thought is omnipotent. The power of right thinking and right attitude

15. *Life*, vol. 1, p. 487.
16. *CW*, vol. 2, p. 301.

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is never exaggerated.

This is the path to perfection — to leave behind all our limitations and to understand that we are the Self, says Swamiji. Through the Atman ideal, we can bring about success in every field. If infinite power that is within us is brought to bear upon matter, it brings about material development. If the same power is brought to bear upon the mind, it brings about intellectual development. If, however, this power is brought to bear upon itself, it will transform us into gods. This is the teaching of Swami Vivekananda.

To know that each one of us is the Self — the repository of all strength, purity, goodness — and to manifest the same is the goal. This is the essence of religion also. How to manifest the innate divinity? There are four faculties in human beings: thinking, feeling, willing and action. All the four faculties can be utilized either singly, or in twos, or threes, or together, to arouse the inner Self, according to temperaments. Jnana yoga corresponds to the thinking faculty. Bhakti yoga corresponds to the feeling faculty. Raja yoga corresponds to the willing faculty. Finally comes the path of karma or selfless action. For this age, this last path has been specially stressed by Swamiji as this could be the religion of the masses. Here again, the idea of practical Advaita comes in. Since there is the Self in every being, we have to see the divinity present in people around us, forget all differences and serve God in them. This will help us grow spiritually. This ideal is oneness from start to finish. And it is universal in appeal and approach. Therefore, the first step is to know the ideal of life as not just bare survival but as having a supreme purpose. The second step is to know the ideal of the Atman. Third, to think about the glory of the inner Self. Finally, to follow the practical aspect of Advaita, which is primarily selfless service of God in living beings. Such is the vast scope of the Vedanta of Vivekananda. And it is this Vedanta that Swamiji wanted the Advaita Ashrama of Mayavati to stand for.

The Glory of the Himalayas

The Himalayas has been considered the land of renunciation (*Tyāga bhūmi*) and the land of yoga (*Yoga bhūmi*) by spiritual seekers since ancient times. For inspiration, for solitude, for sadhana, for holy company, for illumination — for almost everything concerning the life of the Spirit, seekers have been resorting to the Himalayas. Religion is not learnt from books. It is through living examples that we learn about the truths of religion. Further, the higher truths of religion are not realized amidst the din and bustle of city life. One has to go far away, to places where silence reigns. Even amongst such 'silent zones', the mountain, and specially the Himalayas, is the best. This is because, there, '...thought will be clear ... the nerves more settled,' says Swamiji.[17] The Himalayas is the birthplace of the Advaita Vedanta. Thousands of yogis and sages have struggled hard to realize the Truth in the lap of the Himalayas down the centuries. Moreover, tradition has it that the Himalayas is the land of Shiva — the God of the contemplatives. It is the birthplace of Parvati, the Mother of all power and knowledge. In the *Gita*, Sri Krishna says that, of the immovables, He is the Himalayas.[18]

Swami Vivekananda was asked once: 'Swamiji, why is it that in spite of their Vedantic thought, the Hindus are idolators?' Swamiji replied: 'Because we have the Himalayas.'[19] Being the birthplace of the holy waters like the Ganga, the Himalayas teaches human beings how to adore God and nature. For, the snow-clad mountain is the symbol of sanctity. Nivedita too got almost the same reply as above to a question of hers. 'Why do they kiss the ground before the image?' she had asked. Swamiji had replied: 'Is it not the same thing to kiss the ground before that image as to kiss the ground before these

17. *CW*, vol. 8, p. 400.
18. स्थावराणां हिमालय:। — *Gita*, 10.25.
19. *Life*, vol. 1, p. 364.

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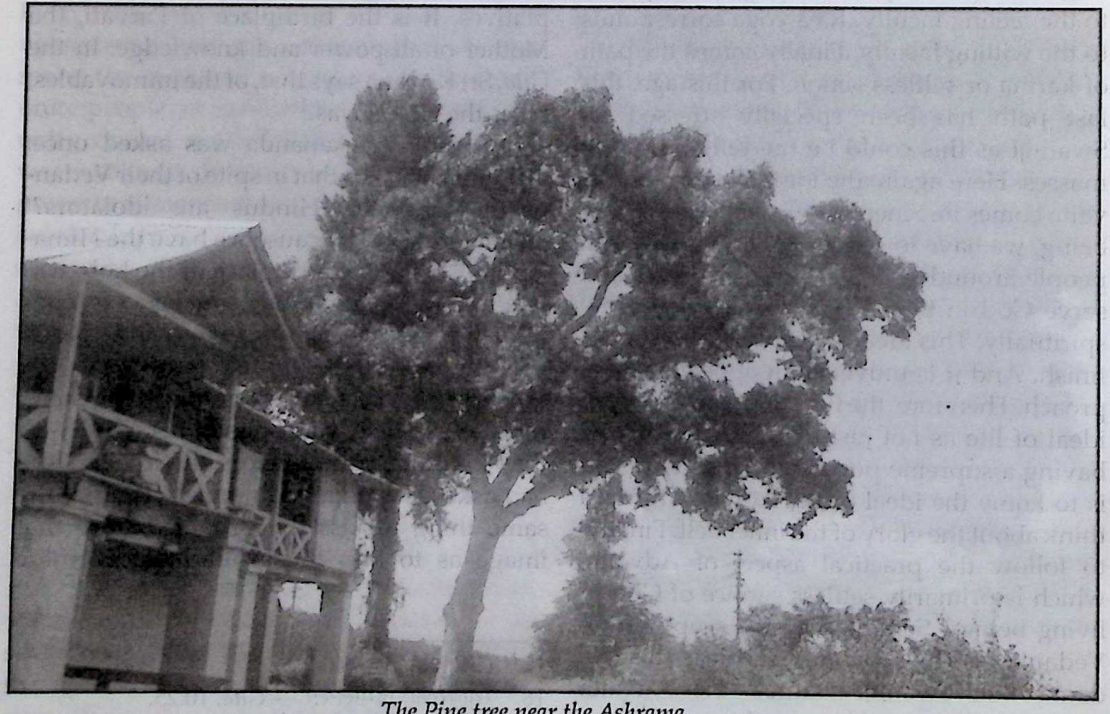
mountains (meanings the Himalayas)?'[20] Being the gigantic representative on earth of all that is good and glorious, all that is majestic and great, all that is pure and holy, the Himalayas can certainly be the best home of Advaita. And so it is!

The one-hundred-year-long history of the Advaita Ashrama is ample proof of the success of Swamiji's plan. Numerous illustrious monks have led austere, contemplative lives here and some of them have been spiritual guides to humanity. Life's path is not strewn with roses here. There have been man-eaters that chilled the heart and also beautiful song birds that filled the soul with inspiration. The monks have witnessed both types of situations. Secondly, the publications of this Ashrama — specially the life and works of Swami Vivekananda — have been inspiring people, and will be doing so, all over the globe. The journal, *Prabuddha Bharata*, has been carrying the message of Vedanta as demonstrated by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda to many homes since the last one hundred years, uninterruptedly. Thirdly, the Mayavati Hospital, which serves God in human beings day and night is a living example of service as a form of spirituality. Fourthly, its Guest House helps world-weary seekers enjoy the charm of spiritual contemplation in the silence and solitude of Mayavati. All these go to show the truth that Swami Vivekananda's efforts are helping humanity. How many had heard about Mayavati a century ago? Thousands all over the world know about it today. True to the wishes of Vivekananda, the Ashrama has stood firmly for the highest level humanity can conceive of during the last one hundred years. It is earnestly hoped that it will continue to inspire humanity for ages to come. ❐

20. *Life*, vol. 2, p. 360.



The Pine tree near the Ashrama

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Swamiji's Vision of the Ashrama at Mayavati and the Ashrama's Scenic Beauty

SWAMI SATYAPRIYANANDA

At Mayavati, as elsewhere, spring is considered the king of seasons. Nature in all its finery is all smiles and the air is laden with sweetness and fragrance of many flowers that make their appearance to the delight of the inmates and visitors, after the cold winter; birds too feel happy, so do bees and a variety of insects. Rhododendrons bloom and cover the mountains with their red flowers. Says the Mayavati Diary Entry of 17 February 1925: 'Signs of spring are showing themselves in the blossoming of the rhododendrons and in the new shoots breaking forth on trees.' A few days later the Entry of 27th reads: 'The rhododendrons are in full bloom and look grand.' These flowers provide an edible juice much enjoyable and a very good substitute to the canned drinks one comes across in the plains. Summer is the time for long walks along the meandering road; some go as far as the 'tiffin-top', some as far as Phurti even. Younger members go as far as Lohaghat having been forced to remain essentially indoors during the cold winter. The monastery, old as it is, is surrounded by a beautiful garden which, though nearly flowerless during winter is, in spring, summer and autumn, in full bloom with a variety of flowers of different hues, sizes, shapes and fragrances: roses, dahlias, chrysanthemums, lilies, magnolias, and many other seasonal flowers too. Each flowering plant invites the visitors' attention as it does the bees and other honey-sucking insects. Besides, one finds a number of flower-pots with flower-bearing plants or cactuses of different shapes and sizes — some bearing flowers even.

Mayavati abounds in birds, big and small, each singing a tune characteristically its own, and highly attractive to the eyes and ears. Usually migratory, they come in March–April and leave in October. Some birds sing musical notes, which can be interpreted to imply a call to man and nature to do something. *Kāphal Pāko* is such a sound from a bird — a call to the tree bearing the tiny and delicious *Kāphal* fruit to ripen. Bell birds go on calling ceaselessly at regular frequency all night from about 8 p.m. to early in the morning. During the day, some birds give a continuous call (which sounds like 'hip-hip hurrah'). Both these birds together seem to hint that an aspirant should call on God likewise, day and night, without ceasing. Some birds come with the question (Diary Entry of 30 September 1934): 'What are you doing, what are you doing, O dear?', reminding the hearer about what he should be doing! Some birds rise early and remind one that it is morning and time for spiritual practices! Some look delightful to the eyes — especially those very tiny birds with unalloyed blue, red, or yellow colour which fly in clusters! Some have a soul-captivating combination of colours! Two crows with a hoarse voice remind the inmates of the plains and they keep company through the cold winter! Then there is the woodpecker with the unanswered question: 'how much would a woodpecker peck if a woodpecker would peck wood?'

The birds that remain with the inmates during winter are also of a variety. Some birds fly in swarms and, after they alight on trees and before starting on their next flight, make merry tunes — a close parallel to which one can recall in the cracker display on the day of the Public Celebration of the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur. These carry the mind across impenetrable mountains, down scorching plains, to the spiritual centre on the bank of the holy Ganges. Some birds there are too small in size and with the peculiar

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habit of most often landing on a tree upside down, though they straighten up in a moment! Vultures too soar in the sky and when one descends close enough, it makes one shudder on hearing the noise its flapping wings can emit; this itself should frighten its prey to death!

The rains descend in monsoon raising a thunderous noise from the many streams and waterfalls[1]. One occasionally sees a rainbow in the sky; sometimes two[2]. On occasions we find a short rainbow caused by clouds *in the direction of the sun*. Unusual and rare, but true. Hail (called *Banmora*) storms which cause much havoc to fruits, flowers, and vegetation[3], high winds[4], clouds of varying shapes and hues are common too. Sights of rising clouds, of clouds 'climbing' over the Dharamgarh mountains and sweeping down the slope towards the Ashrama, of clouds 'too weak to rise' and content to stay at levels lower than the Ashrama, are common.

It is a rare sight to see flashes of lightning among clouds at a lower height; something one does not find in the plains. After a hail, the ice pellets lying on the ground melt very soon. Quite often the atmosphere is misty, and as dense mists flow past, they create an unusual experience of rains. Of course, it is cold when it actually rains and there is a supporting cold breeze! Rains cease but then moisture rises from the ground and one can see the formation of clouds.

In early days the Ashrama had two lakes near the present cowshed. Both these would be brimming during the rains, and the water overflowing the bank would cause landslides. This was a matter of great concern until subsequently during the time of Swami Chidatmanandaji it was decided that the lakes be emptied and used effectively for wheat cultivation. Some of the Mayavati Diary Entries

1. *9 August 1924:* The water from our Mayavati Niagara & the Dhara was gushing in torrents in the evening. *29 September 1924:* The Dhara looked a veritable waterfall & there was another across the road into the Mayavati streamlet. There was another near the walnut orchard. Both the lakes were overflowing... *15 October 1924:* Both the lakes are full. The Niagara is in full swing & the water near the Dhara comes down in torrents & has formed a miniature waterfall. *17 July 1942:* Last night it rained cats & dogs. And the raining is continuing even till this morning. It was raining all through the day. The dried up springs are again resonant with life. From inside the rooms one can hear the murmuring music of the rushing, leaping, gushing, steaming, and foaming springs. *5 August 1943:* It has been raining since yesterday. We have no sun these days. Real rainy season starts with August. The torture of the monsoon makes Mayavati really hopeless.
2. *24 September 1923:* It was a very beautiful moon-lit night. Patches of clouds enhanced the glory of the night and the moon rays reflected a rainbow over the clouds. *15 April 1924:* It rained in the evening about sunset & there was a beautiful double rainbow reflected against the eastern hills.
3. *29 May 1946:* Lot of damage was done to vegetable garden and potato seedlings by the unprecedented hail. *9 March 1952:* At about 6.15 p.m., a heavy shower of hailstones began and it continued for more than 5 minutes. Very big hailstones fell (size: approximately 5" [diameter or circumference?] a stone). The whole region became covered with a white sheet of hailstones, which looked like the aftereffect of a snow-fall. *30 April 1969:* There was heavy hailstorm this evening. All the hills here became covered with ½" to 1" of hail-stones. It is feared that all fruits, vegetables and wheat will be destroyed by this hailstorm.
4. *22 March 1960:* Rains, hails and strong wind have created a havoc. It was something like a tornado. It continued throughout the day. Some trees have fallen. One bench was carried away, and the wooden gate with rose creeper has given way to the strong wind. The temperature came down as if winter had started.

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pertaining to the lakes in this connection are:

19 September 1914: Three Brahmacharins, Pravash, Sitapati and Bharat, together with Mohan Lal go to see the condition of the lake which overflowing swept away along with its current some trees and blocked the passage leading to Mother's Bungalow. They waited there for nearly two hours and instructed the servants to cut passage ways for the accumulated water to flow down.

24 August 1948: ...the first report we got from Swami Amoghananda, who was going to the cowshed, was that there was a landslide just near the small tea garden to the left of the Ashrama. Shastri Maharaj [Swami Yogeswarananda] went there. The two tanks in the garden above were overflowing and they were the cause for the landslide. After tea three or four of us went with servants carrying pick-axes and spades to the spring area first and directed the course of the water. Then two or three channels were made for the tank water to flow out from the garden above. Everywhere there were heavy falls — waterfalls everywhere. Rain was continuing still. With raincoats on, we had to work for canalising the water flow. Deep and huge falls were threatening our spring. They were also given a different direction. It was said that such heavy rains and so many waterfalls were not seen in living memory. We all enjoyed the fun. Sw. Ananyananda, Brs. Lakshmana and Vijaya went to the riverside. It was a grand sight. Like spun cotton, water was gushing in the narrow valley in its course. *25:* The road where the landslide had occurred was repaired in the morning. The water flow was still continuing though considerably diminished in volume.

15 September 1951: The water of the lakes were baled out by cutting outlets.

During the rainy season, wood for lighting fire has to be preserved in advance so that cooking food does not become a problem. When the sun rises or sets, thousands of cicadas make a crazy din in chorus! In contrast, there is the tiny insect *pissu* (flea) which likes to stay on clothes and move about when it is dark making a peculiar sensation which disturbs one in meditation and sleep; they even bite. And these appear to have spring-loaded feet, for once the light is switched on, lo and behold, they are not to be seen. Only immersing the clothes on one's body in a bucket of hot water with the room dark, is the sure way out of this menace. But then they are back if you just go through the jungles!

Rats too are a menace. They are also of a variety and keep running in the gap between planks overhead, sometimes peeping in to see if there is something for them to eat. Mousetrap is the solution, but then instead of killing them, some prefer to take them out for a joy ride (no joy to it) as one would a pet dog and leave them at a distant place. Then there is the occasional visit of locusts which feed on vegetable crops (Diary Entries of 28 December 1902, and 17, 23, 24 July 1951). Swarms of insects come occasionally to feed on the petals of roses. One comes across parrots of two types: those with a short tail, and those with a long tail which are not seen in the plains. Parrots too fly about in groups and cause havoc to vegetation and fruit crops. An ever-watchful guard is the only solution.

Then there are the caterpillars, flies, insects, bees and their sworn enemy—the tiger bee[5]—, scorpions, butterflies, and a variety of other life forms. One wonders on seeing the ever murmuring bee, the ever busy bee with its store of vitality, and with the poet Isaac Watts one sings:

> How doth the little busy bee
> Improve each shining hour,
> And gather honey all the day
> From every opening flower!

The rainy season also invites the quiet frogs (indeed they do not make such noise as those

5. *27 October 1943:* 'Tiger bees' coming these days in large numbers to attack the small honey bees — a number of them were killed using badminton rackets.

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in the plains which croak without break, saying as it were, '*Ram, rokkha koro, Rama, protect me*'. Even the frogs here seem to respect Swamiji's wishes!) which getting attracted to the headlights of passing vehicles get crushed under the wheels.

There are the blood-sucking leeches[6] which invariably get their share of blood from the unwary traveller who dares to go over mountain paths. Leeches are to be found also on tar roads! Gum boots are not much of a help. So, the inmates are well prepared for such occasions. A pinch of salt kills the leech, and the blood oozing from the wound can be treated with medicines or left to heal on its own. Those who are careless and fail to observe the leech at play, can have their bed-covers soaked in blood! There is another variety of leech[7] which finds bovine blood more relishing. Finding their way into the noses of the cows and bulls or into their hoofs, these leeches grow in size in safety. The veterinary doctor knows how to get them out of their hiding and lead them to death! The villagers have a local superstition: that the leeches should be tied to a string and left to dry, else they will grow in numbers!

Another trouble is that during the rains, the clouds on the north to north-west prevent the visitor from having a look at the Himalayan range; this problem starts even before the rains actually descend and continues as long there are clouds. Then there is the problem of possible landslides which obstruct communication. The Diary Entry of 23 October 1924 gives a graphic description of the loss of communication during one rainy season:

> Mr. Cooke arrived at 3.30 p.m. His luggage arrived late in the evening. He gives a vivid description of the damage done by the flood to the bridge over the Chalti river. He says the bridge has lost its support at both ends and that it hangs mid-air on the wire-cage on the two sides which is supported at the ends by uprights on both banks. So it is more like a cradle. One has to climb up to the bridge by catching hold of two trunks of trees.

One can imagine that at such times there would be postal delay, and when the post finally arrives, one certainly finds that the mail is soaked in rain water!

Another entry in the Diary dated 19 June 1927 reads:

> At about 2 p.m. Satyen Maharaj and Prasanta Maharaj arrived here from Almora. They have taken us by surprise as we were not at all ready to receive them at such an early date. Both of them were almost drenched in rain, and leeches clustered all around their legs, right up to the knees.... Water is leaking in every room, which has created a great trouble to all.

Flies, butterflies and bees often find their way into the rooms! The sad part is that they do not themselves find their way out nor do they understand that the inmates are really guiding them to the free, fresh air outside! Repeatedly striking themselves against window panes, they stay indoors and prefer to die of hunger rather than be guided by human beings. One cannot but muse over this and compare it to our own sad state of being bound in *Māyā*.

Though opinion is divided on whether it is a blessing or a curse, Mayavati is now more modern than it was in the distant past: it has

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6. *19 June 1927:* Both of them are almost drenched in rain, and leeches were clustered all around their legs, right upto the knees. *20 August 1934:* Leeches drew out profuse blood from our all-bone and all-adventurous editor, Sw. Pavitrananda, the thin-as-palm-leaf-toy-soldier, the hero of our today's expedition.
7. *25 February 1918:* A big leech is found in the nose of the horse. Doctor tries to bring it out but in vain. *26:* Bharat extracts a big leech from Tibu's [horse] nose by means of a forceps. The leech is about 10" long. *27:* Bharat extracts another leech a little smaller than yesterday's from Tibu's nose. *3 March 1918:* The fourth leech is extracted today from Tibu's nose.

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electrical connection[8]; a metalled road from Lohaghat[9], a computer for the journal's work[10], a generator[11] for operation during occasional emergency needs of the journal's work on computer and another for the hospital, a dependable water-source with six storage tanks (one of these is named 'Swami Vireswarananda Tank') and a jeep. Then there is the solar light[12]; the gramophone, radio, and transistor radio[13] — which have been displaced by a public address / music system — for the patients of the dispensary/hospital; at various times a pedometer,

8. *22 March 1964:* Men of electric department at work at the Ashrama. They began work here from 19th, Yogasthananda heard from them. *19 December 1965:* Electricity has come to Mayavati tonight at 8.50 p.m. *1 April 1966:* P.B. building has got the electrical connection today. All lights are burning there. *3 April 1966:* Ashrama building has got the electrical connection tonight. *4 April 1966:* Hospital has got the electric connection tonight. *3 May 1966:* Guest House has got electric connection. *27 June 1982:* The new Goshala in the lake garden got first new supply of current.

9. *7 August 1938:* Makhan M. and Sachin M. went to Lohaghat in the afternoon to attend a meeting in connection with the proposed motor-road from Tanakpur to Lohaghat. About one hundred persons attended the meeting and unanimous resolution was passed in favour of the proposal. *15 November 1941:* The engineer suggested that we might apply to the D.C. for taking up the road from Lohaghat to Mayavati under government care on the ground that it might be considered as a feeder to the main road from Ashkot to Tanakpur. *31 December 1955:* Road work [motor road] begins. *17 February 1956:* The road work, it seems, has started on many places between Lohaghat and Mayavati.... *22 to 30 April 1959:* Notable event: Sanction of Rs. 1 lakh for the construction of pucca road from Lohaghat to Mayavati. Work is expected to be completed by June '60.

   The road was metalled during 1993–1994.

10. Thanks to the generous financial assitance from Prof. Shiv Kumar Gupta, USA, a long-time friend of ours, now we have got a computer here, thus bringing back to *PB*'s home a major portion of its publication work from Calcutta. This will save a lot of time we formerly lost in postal communication with distant Calcutta. The final lithoprinting etc., however, will continue to be done at Calcutta. (*Prabuddha Bharata*, 1996, p. 451.) *14 April 1996:* Sw. Satyapriyananda brought with him a set of computer machines for the P.B. Office. *15:* Sw. Satyapriyananda with the help of Br. Bipin [Madhavachaitanya] fixed the computer machine in the P.B. Office and checked the performance. The performance was found quite alright.

    Another computer and a scanner arrived at Mayavati on 21 October 1998.

11. *25 June 1997:* Sw. Satyapriyananda and Sw. Nirmohananda returned from Bareilly having purchased a new generator set for the P.B. computer.

    The hospital's generator was kindly donated by Sri Hemant Jukaria of Lohaghat in September 1998.

12. *18 February 1992:* Today some Govt. technicians came and fitted three Solar Domestic Light Systems — two in the hospital and one in the Ashrama. These Light Systems have been donated by the NEDA to our hospital, and have been arranged by our Dr. Swamiji. *26 May 1998:* Sw. Anubhavananda went to Lohaghat and returned after dusk with three sets of Solar Lights purchased from Pithoragarh. The lights will be fitted in the Ashrama building.

13. *9 May 1912:* Gramophone played in the Ashrama by Fabu before all the boys & coolies. *13 April 1949:* A Radio has come to Mayavati from Calcutta thro' Swami Yogeswaranandaji. For the first time in the history of Mayavati, a Radio has come today for the use of the Ashrama & Hospital. *13 March 1965:* The transistor set, which Philips India Ltd. have donated to the hospital, arrived by rail.

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a binoculars, or an altimeter[14] found its way into Mayavati; power tilling was resorted to for agricultural work[15]. A greenhouse was set up in October 1998 through the generous help of a friend. Yet with all this it must be admitted that science never got a strong grip over the thinking of the ashramites![16] It was only an aid that could be used with much comfort and as easily set aside.

The Ashrama's post-office in the Prabuddha Bharata building (started on 1 April 1919) has its (the post-office's) own telephone changed recently (May/June 1998) from the open line system to the MARR system. The rains, the snow fall and the storm which cause falling of branches[17] do havoc to the telephone system. Electricity usually gets hit during the snows, but one can guess that rains are equally effective.

Almost imperceptibly rains give way to the Himalayan winter with a brief autumn in between. A vivid picture of Mayavati's autumn is found in the following description in the Mayavati Diary Entry of 27 September 1942:

> A very charming day indeed! The spotless blue sky overhead, in the horizon the silver lining of the silver-bright snow with an infinite expansive blue behind, the murmuring of the streams, the smiling green hills all around — all these at once bring a joy illimitable, a peace unknown and a serenity undefined, to human heart. This is the autumnal Mayavati!

There are several other entries too.[18]

Surrounded by the Champavat and

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14. *11 October 1926:* Upen took the pedometer with him and it was found that the distance from the Sui jungle to here is 6 m, 6 furlongs and from Lohaghat 3 m, 5 furlongs. *23 November 1954:* Sw. Nikhilanandaji presents one binoculars to this Ashrama. *9 September 1978:* Br. Sushanta Chaitanya (U.S.A.), with an altimeter, went to the different places and recorded the following measurements (altitudes): Ashrama 6400 ft.; Dharamgarh 6950 ft.; Bench Point 6600 ft.; Shetty Field 6650 ft.; Lake Garden 6500 ft.; Mother's Bungalow 6300 ft.; Lohaghat Point 6750 ft.; River 6000 ft.; Hospital 6300 ft.
15. *7 June 1988:* Power tiller is tilling the land in the kitchen garden.
16. *15 September 1948:* Our Ashrama clock was slow by 48 minutes. It was in a world of our own that we were living for the last few days. After the night class, the correct time was set. [Clocks had to be sent even then to Calcutta for repair!]
17. *24 December 1991:* Rain started from the morning. From about 10:30 a.m. it started snowing and continued for about two to three hours. The accumulation of snow was about 8". It snowed again at night. ... One of the twin oak trees [*under which Swami Turiyananda, it is said, used to sit in meditation*] that had been standing behind the Ashrama building (the one on the Ashrama side) today fell down suddenly. ... On examination it was found that its roots had rotted off greatly which caused the fall, and added to that was perhaps the extra load of the accumulated snow on it. Such a sudden end of this 'long silent witness' of the weal and woe of the Ashrama for decades caused much grief in the brothers.
18. *27 September 1920:* In the evening when the shadows of the night were fast closing upon the earth the snow view of the Himalayas became a little indistinct but still the lunar rays flooded the atmosphere with their superbly glorious brilliance and the whole nature seemed to be sleeping in silvery silence. The snows glistened in the moon-rays and the pin-drop silence of the night broken in upon by the charming warblings of the nocturnal birds was all the more intensified and spread a magical panorama of beauty all round. With the Himalayan calm and the soothing grandeur of nature's beauty, it was indeed one of the most precious nights ever experienced in life. *2 October 1922:* Thousands of cosmos are all abloom and the Ashrama is smiling as it were at the call of autumn. The silvery moon is shining in the starry sky shed-

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Dharamgarh mountains on three sides, the Ashrama receives in the cold winter that follows the pleasant autumn, the very welcome rays of the sun from as late as 8.30 a.m. to about 4.30 p.m.; the Mayavati Hospital and the T.B. segregation ward at successively lower heights in the shadow region receive sunshine very briefly; the guest house in the shadow of the towering mountain practically receives no sunshine allowing frost to deposit and stay throughout the day. Fogs are common and hamper visibility in general and of the snow-ranges in particular. Quite often one chances to see in the morning, fog over the Bishen village making the village totally obscure to us from the Ashrama. Over the undulating surface of the fog float as it were some of the higher mountains with tree tops projecting over the fog. And this with the snow-range in the far background! Splendid is the word. Sometimes the sun, though setting behind the Champavat mountains, is still above the horizon and gives a mystic light as its cool rays stream through the gap between the Champavat and the far mountains.

A snowfall which, unlike the rain, is a quiet affair, leaves plentiful snow on the shadow regions; the accumulated snow continues to remain for more than a month even! Snow usually falls here first as fine sand (called *bajri*) and then descends as fluffy snow-flakes. One can better appreciate the beauty of variegated colours Nature provides to the eyes when snow settles little by little on the branches and leaves of trees making green leaves first greenish white and then a faded green. Dull — that is how it all looks with white snow stretching all around whither one looks. It is nice to watch and hear snow held by leaves and branches of trees as they melt in part and fall under gravity making a peculiar rustling sound. The Diary Entries of 13 and 14 December 1922 picture the scenery in these words:

> From 6 o'clock to our great astonishment it began to snow which continued incessantly the whole day long till nightfall. The fall is from 8 inches to 10 inches high. The scenery was simply grand. The earth, the trees, the distant hills, the sky — all white - white - white with snows. Many of us had not seen snowfall before and it seemed to us as if we had been carried to a fairyland! We went out on an excursion to the lake and returned through the garden. O! What a beautiful sight! It requires a Scott to give vent to the feelings of one's mind and to describe the scene adequately.
>
> The scenery is indescribable when the first golden sunbeams fall upon the trees and hills clothed in milk-white snow. For the whole day rustling and sliding sounds were heard on all sides due to the falling of snows from trees & roofs. Towards the evening the scenery is even more beautiful.

Another set of entries in the Diary describes in equally sublime words the majestic scenery and the bitter cold in the winter of 1919:

> *19 January 1919:* Heavenly sight. Everything is wrapped up in pure whiteness — a sight baffling all description. ... Intensely cold. *21:* The cold is most trying. *22:* Most unpleasant.... *30:* This morning on rising from bed, we find again a heavy snowfall about six inches deep. Everything again looks clothed in pure white garment. ... Piercing wind blows accompanied by falling of sleet. Lightning flashes and distant thunderstorms with the roaring of clouds all throughout the day. The chillness can better be imagined than described. In a word, it is most terrible!

The sloping roof-tops (v-design is ill-conceived here, though soothing to the eyes, and a drain to lead rain water away from the roof is bad planning) are several inches thick (sometimes even a foot) with an apparently never-melting snow which melts under the feeble solar heat slowly, drips as water while

> ding its beautiful balmy lustre all around, & making the milky snow-range dimly visible. Some birds are cooing every now and then from among the bushes, breaking the sombre silence of the Himalayas with their melodious tune. The scene is simply grand & charming — not to be described but to be enjoyed.

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it also glides down, and hangs down from the edge of the roof to such distances (even as much as a foot) as the snow can carry without breaking off and falling down here and there with a heavy though harmless thud! One has to make convenient pathways through the snow so one can move about.

In one winter it snowed very badly (see Mayavati Diary Entries dated 1–19 January 1945[19]). These are too bad days for cattle—extreme cold and not much fodder unless one is alert to stock it beforehand. On this occasion, the village women of Phurti came to our rescue and carried straw from Lohaghat to the Ashrama *free of cost*—a testimony to their 'love for the cows'. On 23 January 1945, the Diary reads, 'Now the cows are happy.' Mr. Feroze Gandhi who was instrumental, 'distributed "Gur" [molasses] among those women of Phurti who had carried straw for our cattle'.

Throwing snow balls at each other for fun and making snow man are a common recreation in winter, if it snows[20]. Sunshine reflected on the snow gives a glare which could damage the eyes! However, in winter there is a greater stillness because even birds take to a low profile searching for food which is not available. Inmates usually become generous and arrange for some food for these helpless winged companions. The road to Lohaghat becomes unmotorable with heavy snow and loose telephone cables (which could be a positive danger); so provisions have to be stocked well in advance, or one has to depend on the hardy hill people who brave the climate undaunted. Winter does havoc to cattle as can be seen from the Diary Entry of 25 February 1923:

> Three calves had already died of cold this winter and this was the last surviving calf, but it too could not bear the extreme continuous cold and at length succumbed to it.... The death of this last calf has given a slight shock to Khagen Maharaj as he left no stone unturned to keep it alive.

North to west of north-west — as seen from the Ashrama — stretch the snow-clad Himalayan ranges which look gorgeous and spread over 250 miles from Panchachulli in the north followed by Nanda Kot, Nanda Devi, Trishul, Nanda Ghunti, Kamet, Nilkantha, Badrinath, Kedarnath and others in the north-west. These snow-clad ranges, receiving the rays of the sun as it rises or sets, gradually take on different enchanting forms which words fail to describe. The Mayavati Diary Entry of 4 October 1942 records:

> Early in the morning a big party went out to see the sunrise from Maneshwar-Monk Mount [the peak above Maneswar as per Diary Entry of 17 October 1943]. The President organized the outing. ... The party started at 5.30 a.m. When they reached the Monk Mount, the first rays of the rising sun were just playing on the far eastern horizon. Such sun rays are seen nowhere. So wonderful is the sight of the horizon with the silver-lining of the Eternal Snow gradually changing into red. To give a Bengali analogy, *Nīl ākāśer gāye āvīr gule dicchilo*. Then the first rays of the sun glowing the tip of the snow-peaks silenced everyone. One after an-

19. *1 January 1945:* ... After meal two huge snowballs were made. They're being preserved for people who might come later, to see. It was such fun. *7:* Snow has confined us all to our rooms and it's really bad to be deprived of our evening walks. *9:* Snow again! ... Life is becoming boring with this sort of weather. *18:* Mr. [Feroze] Gandhi returned today. He had a terrible experience coming over the snow. The road was so bad that his progress was incredibly slow and night overtook him on the way and he had to spend the night on the road.

20. *8 February 1947:* Went to Shetty Field in the afternoon and had a snow fight. *19 December 1961:* Br. Brihat Chaitanya made a snowman. *16 January 1963:* Swamis Yogasthanandaji, Smarananandaji and Br. Brihat Chaitanya went to Lohaghat View and the bench to see the depth of new snow. They made a snowman.

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other the eternal snow peaks were shining gold and diamond like. Then the peep of the Sun God just a little below the long Himalayan ranges parallel with the horizon was capturing the attention of the seers. This part of the sunrise cannot be described within such a short compass of a daily diary note. But one should write a line or two, just so I put some idea of this unsurpassed beauty on record. The thrown out rays on the blue sky forming seven distinct ray-paths were tremendous. One of the Swamis said that each one of them should be considered as one of the seven horses of the chariot in which the Sun God travels. My readers of course know this reference to the Hindu mythology. Suddenly all eyes were surprised to see something like a star climbing the hills from just the place whence the rays were coming. Oh, the Sun! The morning Sun! The rising Sun! Nobody could speak — nobody could withdraw his eyes — nay, all were in a trance as it were, at the sight of a phenomenon which is really one of the most wonderful things to be seen on the earth. Very quickly the sun rose. Within a minute or two, the sun was above the hills — the dew-bathed green hills were gathering warmth — the birds began to sing — here and there smokes were circling round the sky — the Swamis then thought of tea. The Manager Swami had taken packets of Nimki and Halua with him. So there was a smile playing on every lip.

Such a sight stills the mind into an internal silence; thus work-frenziness gets a bad jolt here everyday. Frost, especially predicted in the early hours following cloudless nights, are hard and slippery; it takes one down a slope without any effort, though the injury to the aged can be too deep to heal!

The blue sky, with the sun — the solitary traveller during the day — sometimes cut off from vision by dense clouds and on rare occasions casting a halo(!) when its strong rays are shielded by a very thin layer of clouds, and star-spangled at night with the moon shedding its sublime rays and casting its heavenly halo, eclipses of the moon and the sun whenever these occur, and an occasional comet (like the recent visitor, Hale-Bopp[21]) when one chooses to visit the earth, are not to be seen so well in the smoke-filled industrialized cities of India.

The hills have not much of an industry to boast of, so job opportunities are scarce and the people, therefore, are by and large poor. People depend on cultivation which is rain-dependent, rearing of goats, sheep and cows, tailoring and setting up shops for their survival. Some live on pension consequent on the retirement of some family member from the military.

An occasional earthquake of not very high intensity and of small duration has been felt in some years. At one time even the chim-

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21. *30 August 1907:* A comet having the shape of a broomstick is visible from the Ashrama at 4 in the night.

'A Remarkable Aerolite', *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1907, p. 196: An event of some importance to those who take an interest in meteoric phenomena, took place on the evening of *22 September 1907* at about 7 p.m. A meteor of exceptional brilliancy appeared in the east, swept across the heaven in a zig-zag path in a westerly direction, and rapidly disappeared. About three minutes after it had passed over the Ashrama, which was lighted up as if by a powerful search light, a loud explosive noise was heard, which reverberated in the mountains. The magnificent appearance presented by this meteor will not readily be forgotten by any of the persons who witnessed it, the nearness and the degree of illumination being altogether unusual.

15 November 1948: Early in the morning, at 4.30 a.m., all ... went to the ridge above Shetty field to see the comet which has been appearing since a few days. They took 'Petromax' light with them and also the gun. They could see the comet dimly though with a long tail of 6 or 7 feet. *20 August 1957:* A comet is visible towards the north-west corner of the sky.

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ney of the guest house broke on account of the shock. The Diary Entry of 28 July 1916 reads, in this connection:

> At 12 a.m. [noon] we all felt a good shock of earthquake which continued for more than a minute or so. The chimney in the guest house broke due to the shock.... When the earthquake began Br. Sitapati was in his room in the upstairs. He could not come down by the staircase; it was such a terrible shock. He had to jump down from the Verandah of the Ashrama. He did not get any ... injury ....

One finds in the forests here trees of various shapes and sizes, which unlike those of tropical forests are tall as if to touch the sky and without much undergrowth: the oak, pine, rhododendron, cypress, deodar (Indian cedar, highly suitable for making wooden furniture as they are durable, take good polish, light, fine-grained and fragrant), to mention a few. There is the silk-cotton tree whose leaves move even when there is a very feeble wind. Standing in front of Fateh Singh's house at a distance of 3 kms. down the road from Mayavati, one can catch a magnificent sight of such a tree up on the mountains, tapering upward and with its branches full of leaves shaking incessantly. This draws the mind of a devotee to the arati of the Divine Mother during the Durga Puja during which a multi-layer *pradip* is waved before the Mother. The cotton seeds from these trees are also a sight to watch as they float in the air whither it takes them.

Trees are a natural resource for the villagers; the leaves of some trees are food for cattle, and the branches are used for lighting fire, so much so the villagers have ensured that most of the mountains are totally barren. Only the mountains under the care of the Ashrama are still protected from this human invasion. Mountain fires are usually lit by the villagers themselves at the foot of a mountain as a convenient method to burn away dry leaves that have fallen on the ground so that fresh grass for cattle may grow. The scene looks grand[22], but in the process many trees get scorched badly in the fire that moves up as it consumes fuel. The Ashrama has to ensure that such fires do not spread to the mountains under its care. This effort has ensured the beautiful Mayavati jungles with an abundance of trees with leaves of various shades of green. The branches of trees also break under the weight of the snow or in a gale. The falling of heavy branches often break water-pipes that supply water to the Ashrama, the Hospital, the guest house and the dairy. Water-pipes also get broken when the water in them freezes under the intense cold (water expands on becoming ice); the inmates know that water has to be left flowing in a trickle to avoid this. But then, if a water-pipe breaks, one can imagine the trouble one has to take to get it fixed braving all the snow!

Another feature of Mayavati is the variety of jungle life that one finds. Leopards do exist[23]; one can hear their call in the mornings or in the evenings and during nights on some

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22. *24 April 1923:* They have set fire to the jungles and at night the view is simply grand — it looks like a garland of fire. *8 May 1923:* The hills are all on fire. The long fantastic lines of fire look very beautiful at night. *21 May 1948:* There was bright moon in the night and fire in yonder hills looked like garland worn by these hills. The sight was enchanting.

23. *31 December 1915:* A man from Suin brought one little cub of a leopard. He found it while coming by a jungly path. We kept it. *4 September 1960:* One full size panther measuring about 8 ft. was noticed by us from the Ashrama. It was resting in the open field of the hill just in front of the urinal. *29 February 1992:* Our dog Chanda was taken away by a leopard yesterday night from the Kutia in the Lake Garden where it was kept.... *8 May 1995:* A boy bitten by a leopard was admitted today in our hospital. It is said that a leopard somewhere near Pancheshwar has become a man-eater and it has already killed five children. This boy is the sixth victim. The injury of this boy is however not very serious. He

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days. You can see them if you are lucky. Leopards are usually afraid of human beings; they prefer dogs for a meal, choose to hunt deer and other animals by pouncing upon them by surprise; they sometimes settle for cows or goats or sheep; rarely they lurk near villages and pounce upon one among a group of playing innocent children when by chance there is a power shutdown. When recognized as man-eaters, they attract the attention of the forest officials who promptly trap them in cages with dog/goat as (unharmed) bait and take them to the Lucknow zoo.[24] There is a graphic description in the Mayavati Diary of an encounter with a panther:

10 October 1930: Shahji shoots a panther this morning. It is brought down to the Ashrama at about 2.30 p.m. The animal lay dead near the southern boundary of Mayavati on the western slope. Shahji met it for the first time on the public road and at once fired at it, but he got frightened and hastened back to the Ashrama. He then went out in search of it with Deven Maharaj after noon. The length of the animal is 6 ft. 3 in. with tail, and the height is 2 ft. 5 in.

26 June 1934: One of our cows has been killed by a panther this afternoon, near the lake. Pyarilal and Bhawani Dutt have gone to the spot and they are sitting on a tree and attempting to kill the panther. Our gun has been given to Pyarilal. *27:* Early in the morning at about 4 a.m. some of us heard a report of firing. Again, at about 6 a.m. we heard 2 reports. At about 6.30, we heard loud shouts of 'Jai! Maharajlogonko jai!' and we found a big panther in our front being carried by some of our servants and accompanied by Pyarilal who killed the panther. The panther which was about 7 ft. long, came to the corpse of the cow at about 4 a.m. and was immediately shot by Pyarilal. They came down from the tree at about 5.30 a.m. and on searching for a while found the panther lying nearby almost dead. Pyarilal again fired 2 shots at the animal and killed it and brought it to the Ashrama amidst loud shouts and rejoicing. The animal was laid down on the lawn and Deven M. took several photographs of it in different postures (singly, with Pyarilal only and 1 group photo). The skin of the panther which is about 7 ft. long has been preserved with nails and teeth and some fat also has been kept for medicinal purposes.

7 November 1961: On their [Swami Smarananda, Brihat Chaitanya and Niren Babu] return journey they found some monkeys were crying and jumping from one tree to another tree near Gher Lake. Swami Smarananandaji made sound like that of a dog at the monkeys. Suddenly a leopard also growled again. The leopard, hiding itself in a small bush, growled under the tree in which the monkeys were crying and jumping. Again Smarananandaji made a sound like that of a dog and the leopard also growled again. On hearing the growling of the leopard, two or three monkeys fell down. Brihat Chaitanya at once warned Smarananandaji not to make any more sound and requested all of them to come back to the Ashrama quietly but quickly before evening.

Tigers were there too, in the past in greater numbers. One description of a tiger being killed by a *shikari* is described in the Diary Entry of 10 August 1912:

A man from Bishun brought a letter at 2-30 p.m. telling that a man-eater has been shot dead by one of the two Shikaris from Bishun who were in search of it since Bachia's death. Mohanlal, Nirmal, Kumtekar, Brojen, Frank, Udia, & Mahboob went at 3-15 [p.m.] to Lohaghat where the tiger was sent. The party reached just in time to have a good look at the beast before it was skinned. It was 8 ft. 6½" in length and was a tigress. The Shikari, Kalu by name, was with his muzzle-loading gun, and narrated how he was informed the previous evening of a buffalo calf having been killed by a tiger. He went to the spot and sat behind a small shrub, when a tiger's cub came and began to lick the carcass. Immediately after came

has been given proper medical treatment.

24. *24 June 1996:* A leopard [which had devoured a small girl of Phurti] was trapped in the Bangaon village by the Forest Department people. All the Ashramites went to see it.

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a majestic tigress, its mother, and on approaching, found the Shikari! She drew the cub to her lap, half standing, when the Shikari aimed and shot. The groan was too much, and the man fled for life homewards, knowing that the bullet had done its effect. The next morning he went and found the beast dead. The skin Mr. Nestor had bought at Rs. 10/-. The tigress had in its stomach what looked like the tail of a snake!

15 June 1923: We have got a very interesting news today. Dharam Singh killed a tiger yesterday near the Khetikhan side jungle. They carried it to the Ashrama in the morning. It is a real Royal Bengal tiger — 7 ft. 9 in. long. Dharam Sigh was following a deer when to his great surprise and alarm he came across the terrible creature just in front of him running after the same deer probably. Fortunately the tiger did not see him and he instantly changed the grape shot for a bullet and shot it down from a distance of say 6 or 7 yards.

29 November 1926: Scarcely had we finished our meal at 12 when Bachchi Singh, the cowherd, cried out from the lake, 'tiger, tiger'. All of us at once rushed to the place with lathis, spear, & Bharat M. with the gun, of course after a little while as he had not finished his meal till then. One black old cow was found lying a little above the upper lake gasping for breath. She was attacked on the neck, a very convenient point to strike an animal to death and blood was welling out from the wound. Her windpipe was torn & breath was escaping through the opening. ... After a little examination we gave up all hope for that cow which afterwards succumbed to the serious wounds towards evening.

16 November 1933: Priyada and Jatin Maharaj went towards Shetty field for an evening walk. Near Shetty field they found a big *Jarau* lying dead, supposed to have been killed by a tiger. The animal seems to be about 6 mds. in weight and its horns are very big and beautiful. *19:* Another animal, a boar, has been found lying dead in a forest nearby, which seems to have been killed by a tiger.

30 December 1933: The cowboy Pata Singh reported to us that he had seen a big tiger near the bench on the Lohaghat Rd., while he had been grazing the cows there. He had been a little above the bench on the hill when he found a big tiger passing by that side. Then he at once got up on an oak tree and the cows began to run away towards the ashrama. The tiger waited near the tree for a while staring at the cowboy several times and then went away downward growling. After a while the cowboy got down from the tree and ran away to the Ashrama and reported the whole thing to us, looking very much frightened.

18 April 1941: The cowboy narrated the story: The cows were grazing there and he was sitting in a place and singing. All on a sudden he heard a groaning sound and found that the bull had been attacked by a tiger. First he thought it to be a small tiger and rushed towards the place crying aloud to terrify the tiger. But to his dismay he then found that it was a huge animal. His head began to reel and somehow he composed himself and fled away from the place. The other cows had already fled. He came to the river and saw that all the cows had gathered there and drove them home. When we searched the spot we could find no trace of the bull. We began to search for it and some blood spots were discovered on the grass. We followed them and came to a place where the grass and small bushes were pressed down and a small path made through them. It was thick jungle. We followed further along narrow passages like this till at last we came to the spot where the bull was lying dead and a portion of its thigh had been eaten up. The spot was covered by thick forest and it was about [a] furlong from the place where the bull was first caught and killed. The tiger had dragged it down all this way. We wondered at the strength it possessed. The bull was a big animal.

6 July 1942: We were surprised to see Pyarilal just standing on the way to bow down to us. He said, on being asked the reason, that he somehow escaped from the clutches of a tiger

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& that the ferocious leopard [tiger?] was shot down in the spot where Swami Swarupanandaji used to meditate. The tiger was lying just near our Golkamra. It was big — its length being ... 6 ft. It caused a great excitement in our hearts.

Bears are visitors during winter as they find the oak acorns delicious; sitting on a high branch of the tree, they pull with their mighty strength neighbouring branches snapping them in the process and winning a free access to the seeds on those branches! They feed on pumpkins too which grow in our garden! Bears, especially if they have little ones, like to go out of the way to injure badly any human being going near by. Correctly has it been said by Rudyard Kipling in *The Female of the Species*,

When the Himalayan peasant
meets the he-bear in his pride,
He shouts to scare the monster,
who will often turn aside.
But the she-bear thus accosted
rends the peasant tooth and nail
For the female of the species is
more deadly than the male.

Snakes are not poisonous, it is said, at these heights, though the Diary Entry of 19 July 1916 mentions a case of snake-bite which proved fatal. Porcupines, which love to feed on potatoes, have their way of digging into the bowels of the earth and the people of the locality are afraid of them on account of their long erect quills (Diary Entries of 8 July 1904; 19 July 1915; 16 July 1922). Even leopards take care to see that they are not hurt by this weapon of porcupines. Wild boar[25] with luxuriant growth roam around and some visit the western slope near the Prabuddha Bharata building to feed on fallen fruits. The forest gives shelter to the large deer known as *Barasinga* (*Sambhar*) which gives out a bugle-like sound. These consume grass specially grown for the dairy cows, and even satisfy themselves to a heavy meal from the kitchen garden[26]. Then there are the diminutive barking deer (*Kakar*), whose barking, as they flee from a possible attack by leopards, can be easily mistaken for that of dogs. There are also the *Sharaos* (locally called *Jaraus*), a species of deer.[27] Two species of monkeys (the red-faced monkey and *langurs* which have black faces and are heavily built) visit Mayavati. They feed on fruits and leaves, and play monkey pranks[28]. Then there are the civets (Diary Entry dated 30 December 1902), the weasel (*Malposha*, see Diary Entries of 4 September 1925 and 30 January 1942), the anteater (Diary Entries of 31 July 1909, 3 September 1923, 6 July 1924), the flying fox (Diary Entry of 31 October 1967) and the flying squirrels (Diary Entry of 2 June 1941). Weasels love the rhododendron for its honey and often enter the apiary at night if precautions are not taken, and, toppling the bee-hives, eat the honeycombs with evident relish. Wolves and

25. *6 September 1923:* Last night, a wild boar entered the garden and ate some good potatoes.

26. *2 October 1923:* A big deer has been damaging the kitchen garden for some days past.

27. *27 July 1941:* In the tomato garden an animal called *Sharao* came in the night to eat tomatoes and was caught in the trap that was set there.

28. *20 October 1968:* At about 11.30 a.m. one most interesting and strange event took place here. The event is: one strong and heavily built monkey suddenly entered into the Editor's office. Rev. Editor Mj. was at that time in his bed-room. Seeing the monkey, our dogs, Poppy and Tudi, ran after it and they also entered into that office room. While in the room, the monkey tried to get out by way of breaking the glasses. It did break some two glasses, but could not [escape]. A small fight ensued between the dogs & the monkey. The monkey was at a loss and due to its jumping the books, manuscripts, pen & pencils — all that were on the table were scattered and thrown away on the floor of the room. In one word, everything became at sixes and sevens. However, the monkey somehow found his way through the main door and ran away.

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wolf-like animals (wild dogs) find mention in the Mayavati Diary [29]. Jungle fowls exist all through the year and many people living nearby, and some from far distant places even, try to shoot them in the evenings. The Ashrama tries its best to prevent such occurrences.

The Ashrama is surrounded by terraced land which was once used for tea plantation. Now most of these lands are effectively used as vegetable gardens, fruit orchards (commonly grown trees are cherry, apricot, pears, apples, lemons, parsimmon, etc.) and for growing cattle feed.

All said and done, Nature at its best, that is Mayavati. The brighter points far outweigh the minor and occasional difficulties. Many are the occasions when the inmates would go for a picnic to one of many spots — Devidhura, Dharamgarh, Ekhathiya Naola, Maneswar [incl. Monk Mount], Swarupananda Point, Shetty Field, Lohaghat (Dak Bungalow, Shiva Mandir), Lohaghat-view Point, Siddha Narasingh, Abbot Mount, Lakes, Champavat, Ozone Point. We cannot resist the temptation to reproduce one such picnic:

1 November 1933: A moonlight picnic was arranged on a peak near the Shetty field and we all went there. Shahji also joined with us. The weather was very fine and the snow ranges shining with moonlight looked very beautiful. A nice shed was erected with several posts and a 'satranchi' tied overhead. There was an arrangement of music also. We carried with us the big folding organ, *bāṇiya tabla* and two sets of cymbals. We sang some songs of Kali kirtan and Siva sangeet. All these songs created a wonderful atmosphere on that mountain peak. We returned to the Ashrama at about 9.45 p.m. after passing such happy moments on the moonlit Himalayan peak.

The inmates played a variety of games too depending on the season: outdoor games such as croquet, badminton, football, and volleyball; indoor games such as word-making, ludo, chess, draughts, carrom; or the parallel bars. There was of course the long walk or the mountain trekking. The Mayavati Diary mentions many such entries, but we give the following two to highlight the keen interest with which games used to be played even from the beginning, and day, or the time of the day, or even the weather was no weighty consideration!

25 June 1910: Kali K. Maharaj [Swami Virajananda] and others had a contested game at croquet in the afternoon.

1 July 1910: Croquet game in the afternoon in the midst of rains (with umbrellas!). *3:* We had a game at croquet up to 9 p.m.!

There were also occasions for humour as the following two Diary Entries reveal:

23 January 1905: We found a rabbit under one of the big Deodar trees by the kitchen garden. Glama [a Bhutia dog] gave chase, crying for his own slowness on the snow!

12 December 1910: The old traditional frippery is distributed to us and the servants. Most of them looked very funny & enjoyed each other's new motley immensely.

II

As to how the Ashrama came to be established at such a scenic location is briefly nar-

29. *29 & 30 September 1909:* A flock of animals (wolf species) numbering about 5 or 6 kills a *Barasinga* at the Ashrama orchard side & in two minutes finishes more than half of it. Our boys go and bring the killed animal and get about 10 seers of meat, the skin besides. The animals came back again and again to the spot. They are said to kill buffaloes, horses and cattle in the villages and roam in packs. *18 March 1918:* While Bahadur is grazing cattle in Shetty field at noon, a wolf attacks a she-goat and bruises her throat. On seeing this, Bahadur gets awfully frightened and cries out for help. The wolf flees. The poor creature bleeds profusely. Doctor applies medicine to the injured part. The goat has been kept in the Dispensary. *24 January 1921:* While returning to the Ashrama, we saw a wolf near the guest-house.

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rated below:

When in the June of 1898 Swamiji was living at Almora with some of his Western and Indian disciples and Gurubhais, news reached him of the sudden and premature demise in May 1898 of Mr. Rajam Iyer, the gifted Editor of the monthly journal *Prabuddha Bharata* which had been started two years before at Madras under his auspices. He at once made up his mind to revive the discontinued paper (discontinued after the publication of the June 1898 issue prepared with material made ready by Rajam Iyer before his demise) as the organ of the Ramakrishna Mission with Swami Swarupananda as its Editor (he having had a wide experience in this line as the Joint Editor of *Dawn*, Calcutta, for some time) and Captain James Henry Sevier as its Manager. He told Mr. Sevier:

> Sevier, you said you would work for the good of India. The climate of Bengal will not suit you. So why don't you stay somewhere near Almora and undertake to conduct *Prabuddha Bharata*? The journal has got over three thousand subscribers. *It was first printed on my advice, and has gradually become a notable instrument for the dissemination of Vedantic knowledge. I don't wish that it should be discontinued.* And I am giving you a capable Editor. Swami Swarupananda has particular experience in that line, and with the help of yourself and Swami Turiyananda he will easily be able to run it.' (Swami Saradananda, *Udbodhan*, vol. 11, p. 111, quoted in *History of Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, 1957, p. 128)

By common consent, the *Prabuddha Bharata* office was transferred to a rented house at Almora called 'Thompson House', and a hand-press with other printing requisites were brought up from Calcutta to Almora [see St. Nihal Singh, *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1945, for an impressive presentation of the details]. The first issue from this new habitation came out in August 1898 in a new garb. Thus, *Prabuddha Bharata* played a key role in shifting the venue of action from Madras to the Himalayas and, as we shall see, in the establishment of an Ashrama as its permanent home. No wonder, Swami Virajananda and a few others were keen on retaining the press and editorial office of *Prabuddha Bharata* at Mayavati [vide Mayavati Diary Entries in August and September 1923] even though the Publication Department had been shifted to Calcutta as early as in May 1920. The publication work of *Prabuddha Bharata* too was shifted to Calcutta from its January 1924 issue, the majority of the Trustees of Advaita Ashrama being in favour of it. However, the editorial office has continued to remain in Mayavati. More details on this later in this issue.

The idea and the necessity of starting a monastery in a cool, secluded hilly region where the East and the West could meet and practise the Advaita philosophy was discussed and decided upon, and it was also thought desirable to have a permanent home for the paper. As Almora proved not secluded enough, Mr. Sevier looked for a place that would give him complete privacy. He and Swami Swarupananda at last selected after personal inspection the present premises of the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati [the Sale Deed mentions this name; some say it was known earlier by the name (a) Māikipot, vide Bimal Chandra Dutta, *Sri Ramakrishna Tirthas* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vivekananda Institute of Research and Culture, 1980), p. 171; (b) Mayeeput (in Hindi), vide *Western Women in the Footsteps of Swami Vivekananda* (New Delhi: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, 1995), p, 143; (c) Maipat, vide Mayavati Diary Entry dated, 10 December 1929; (d) Maipata, which is how it is still known among the hill people], then in the district of Almora and now in the district of Champavat, fifty miles east of the town — a tea estate called Glen Gyle Tea Estate [vide Trust Deed of Advaita Ashrama] owned by General MacGregor of extensive acreage and jungles and with three commodious houses with slated roofs.

The topmost double-storeyed building was where the monks lived and worked. Each had a cubicle on the upper storey; downstairs

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on one side was the sitting room with a large fire-place, and, on the other side, the Press and the book-binding department. The sitting room also served as the Prabuddha Bharata Office and as the dining room. Of the other two buildings, the upper one, being sunnier, was Mother's *winter* residence and guest house in summer; the lower one, a bungalow, was Mother's *summer* residence (*Prabuddha Bharata*, 1931, p. 2).

The site was purchased on 2 March 1899 and the Ashrama was started on Sunday, 19 March 1899, the day of the public celebration of the birth of Sri Ramakrishna. The *Prabuddha Bharata* office was also transferred to Mayavati from the Thompson House at Almora; the Captain busied himself with remodelling the vast tea estate: new plantations, a residence for sadhus, the laying down of connecting pathways, cleaning the lake and so on; and Mother Sevier helped in editing Swamiji's lectures for the purpose of publication and in managing the affairs of the journal. These were the gods which the early members were content to worship through their work. Swami Vivekananda, who had always dreamt of such a place, where no ceremonial worship would be performed, and where the solitude, coolness, grandeur and natural beauty would spontaneously draw the mind inward, became immensely joyful when this dream of his was actualized. When did he have this dream? Perhaps often, but we narrate below one instance where the dream was as transparent as a vision. It will be clear that all the developments leading to the shifting of the Ashrama from Almora to Mayavati were only steps in bringing into reality this vision of Swamiji.

Swami Vivekananda was then on the way back to India from the U.S.A. via London. The work in London had been one of great strain for the Swami. Those who planned the Swami's holiday in Switzerland and accompanied him on his tour — intended to be a rest after the strenuous exertion and strain of work — were Captain and Mrs. Sevier, and Miss Henrietta Müller. The time was ideal, being the holiday season when most of the students and admirers of the Swami were leaving London for a seaside or mountain resort. The mention of a trip to Switzerland and of a trip to the Alps immensely delighted the Swami who exclaimed: 'Oh, I long to see the snows and wander on the mountain paths! Above all, I must cross a glacier.'

Even before starting on this tour, on 7 July 1896, he wrote from London to the Hale Sisters (*CW*, vol. 8, p. 379):

> I am going with three English friends to the Swiss Hills. Later on, towards the end of winter, I expect to go to India with some English friends who are going to live in my monastery there, which by the by, is in the air yet. It is struggling to materialize somewhere in the Himalayas.

It required in the 1890s much time, money and physical exertion to visit this land of marvellous scenery, hazardous mountain ascents, deep snows, glacier crossings, and expensive resorts. Primitive conveyance and generally poor roads added to the discomfort. Leaving London on 19 July 1896, the party crossed the English Channel at Dover to go to Calais, spent the night in Paris in a hotel which overlooked the beautiful and peaceful Lake Léman, and then went to Geneva where Swamiji spent the greater part of the day at a national exhibition of Swiss products and industries, and happy as a child enjoyed a balloon-ride in the company of Mr. and Mrs. Sevier. The party then reached the far-famed resort of Chamonix in south-east France. Here the grand spectacle of Mont Blanc opened up to view presenting a sight which the Swami said he had not enjoyed even in the Himalayas! 'This is really wonderful!' he cried out. 'Here we are actually in the midst of snows!' 'In India', he said, 'the snow is so far distant that one walks and climbs for days and days to come near it. But then, the Alps are mere hills compared with those mighty peaks that tower on the borders of Tibet.' 'Yet,' he con-

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tinued, 'this is beautiful! Come! Let us make the ascent of Mont Blanc!' That is Swami Vivekananda. However, gazing through the telescope he agreed with the guides that climbing those steep ascents were meant only for skilled mountaineers.

It is not difficult to see that memories of the Himalayas had already been kindled in the Swami. Observing the characteristics of the peasantry, the Swami remarked to his friends: 'Why, these people in many of their manners and in their costumes remind me of the peasants in the hills of the Himalayas! Those long baskets that they carry on their backs are exactly like those used in the mountainous districts of my country.' It was in these Himalayas of Europe that the Swami spoke to those who were to be the founders of the Advaita Ashrama and to dedicate their lives to it, of his cherished dream of establishing a monastery in the heart of his own beloved Himalayas.

This idea of starting a monastery in the Himalayas Swamiji wrote explicitly in many of his letters written at about this time from Switzerland and from London after his return thereto. On 5 August 1896 he wrote from Switzerland (postmarked Saas-Fee) to Christine Greenstidel (*CW*, vol. 9, p. 89):

> I am in Switzerland — constantly on the move — getting a much needed rest. It is a miniature Himalayas, and has the same effect of raising the mind up to the Self and driving away all earthly feelings and ties. I am intensely enjoying it.

On that very day Swami Vivekananda wrote to Lala Badri Shah of Almora expressing his desire to start a Math at Almora or near Almora (*CW*, vol. 6, p. 368):

> I want to start a Math at Almora or near Almora rather. I have heard that there was a certain Mr. Ramsay who lived in a bungalow near Almora and that he had a garden round his bungalow. Can't it be bought? What is the price? If not to be bought, can it be rented? Do you know of any suitable place near Almora where I can build my monastery with a garden etc.? I would rather like to have a hill all to myself.

After travelling through Germany and Holland Swamiji came back to London on 17 September 1896. On 20 November 1896, Swamiji wrote from London to Alasinga Perumal of Madras (*CW*, vol. 5, p. 123):

> Mr. Sevier and his wife are going to start a place near Almora in the Himalayas which I intend to make my Himalayan Centre, as well as a place for Western disciples to live as Brahmacharins and Sannyasins.

And on the very next day he wrote to Lala Badri Shah (*CW*, vol. 6, p. 383):

> I have three English friends with me. Two of them, Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, are going to settle in Almora. They are my disciples, you know, and they are going to build the Math for me in the Himalayas. It was for that reason I asked you to look for some suitable site. We want a whole hill, with a view of the snow-range, all to ourselves. It would of course take time to fix on a site and complete the building. In the meanwhile will you kindly engage a small bungalow for my friends? The bungalow ought to accommodate three persons. I do not require a large one. A small one would do for the present. My friends will live in this bungalow in Almora and then go about looking for a site and building.

Again, a week later, in a letter to the Hale Sisters dated 28 November 1896, Swamiji wrote from London (*CW*, vol. 6, pp. 384–5):

> ...I am going to start a centre in Calcutta and another in the Himalayas. The Himalayan one will be an entire hill about 7,000 ft. high — cool in summer, cold in winter. Capt. and Mrs. Sevier will live there, and it will be the centre for European workers, as I do not want to kill them by forcing on them the Indian mode of living and the fiery plains. My plan is to send out numbers of Hindu boys to every civilized country to preach — get men and women from foreign countries to work in India. This would be a good exchange.

It is quite clear from the above letters of Swamiji written from Switzerland and from London on his return thereto at the end of the

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tour, that the sight of the Alps and the people of the hill area in Switzerland had strongly reinforced his determination to start a monastery in the heart of the Himalayas with a very definite purpose and plan.

In the Alpine snows Swamiji had given vent to his thoughts very precisely when he cried:

> Oh, I long for such a monastery where I can retire from the labours of my life and pass the rest of my days in meditation. It will be a centre for work and meditation, where my Indian and Western disciples can live together. I shall train them as workers, the former to go out as preachers of Vedanta to the West, and the latter to devote their lives to the good of India.

A thought, something akin to a vision, also crossed the minds of the Seviers, and the Captain, speaking for himself and his wife, exclaimed, 'We must have such a monastery!' (*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, pp. 114-8)

On 16 December 1896, after another spell of classes and lectures, Swami Vivekananda left London for India via the Continent. Mr. and Mrs. Sevier accompanied Swamiji on this trip. What was Mrs. Sevier, whom the Swami addressed from his very first contact 'Mother', to gain from this trip to India? Swamiji had told her, 'Don't you feel like coming to India? If you do come, I will give you the very best of all that I have experienced.' Goodwin sailing from Southampton was to join them at Naples. They reached Colombo in January 1897. As is well known, Swami Vivekananda travelled from Colombo to Almora, receiving overwhelming ovation at many important towns and delivering many inspiring lectures.

On Swamiji's arrival in Almora sometime in May 1897, an Address of Welcome in Hindi was presented to him by the local citizens. Referring to Swamiji's plan of founding an Ashrama in the heart of the Himalayas, the Address mentioned:

> We have heard with great pleasure that you intend establishing a Math here, and we sincerely pray that your efforts in this direction may be crowned with success. The great Shankaracharya also, after his spiritual conquest established a Math at Badrikashrama in the Himalayas for the protection of the ancient religion. Similarly, if your desire is also fulfilled, India will be greatly benefited.

In his fitting reply to the Address, Swami Vivekananda observed (*CW*, vol. 3, p. 354):

> Friends, you have been very kind to allude to an idea of mine, which is to start a centre in the Himalayas, and perhaps I have sufficiently explained why it should be so, why, above all others, this is the spot which I want to select as one of the great centres to teach this universal religion. These mountains are associated with the best memories of our race; if these Himalayas are taken away from the history of religious India, there will be very little left behind. Here, therefore, must be one of those centres, not merely of activity, but more of calmness, of meditation, and of peace; and I hope some day to realize it.

Swamiji well knew about the Ashrama's 'materializing' in the Himalayas even before his leaving Calcutta on 20 June 1899 on his second visit to the West. He had, in response to a request, agreed to send four of his disciples—Swamis Sachchidananda (Senior), Virajananda and Vimalananda, and Brahmachari Harendranath (Swamiji's nephew)—to help in the work of the Ashrama (*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 433). Yet, on 27 December 1899 he wrote to Christine from Los Angeles:

> I am making money fast — twenty-five dollars a day now. Soon I will work more and get fifty dollars a day. In San Francisco I hope to do still better — where I go in two or three weeks. Good again — better, say I — as I am going to keep the money all to myself and not squander it any more. And then I will buy a little place in the Himalayas — a whole hill — about say, six thousand feet high with a grand view of the eternal snows. There must be springs and a tiny lake. Cedars — the Himalayan cedar forests — and flowers, flowers everywhere. I will have a little cottage; in the mid-

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dle, my vegetable gardens, which I will work myself — and — and — and — my books — and see the face of man only once in a great while. And the world may go to ruin round about my ears, I would not care. I will have done with all my work — secular or spiritual — and retire. My! how restless I have been all my life! Born nomad. (CW, vol. 9, pp. 131–2)

Perhaps the reader might find clues to why Swamiji wrote, 'I am making money fast', and 'I will buy a little place in the Himalayas', in his letters prior to this!

Such a monastery had been established, as we said before, on 19 March 1899, — though purchased by the Seviers — fulfilling Swamiji's dream, and Swami Vivekananda too did visit the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati on his return from the West and stayed there between 3 January and 18 January 1901. This only visit of Swamiji to Mayavati we shall recount later in this issue.

Though the extracts from the letters of Swami Vivekananda give an insight into how the Swami wanted the Advaita Ashrama to grow, a precise statement in his own words can be had in what is popularly called the Prospectus of Advaita Ashrama. We resist the temptation to reproduce it in full once again. Instead, we give below the part of the Prospectus and several Upanishadic statements embodied in the Trust Deed executed by Mrs. C.E. Sevier on 31 March 1903, before Behari Lal Chandra, Registrar, at the Calcutta Registry Office:

'In Whom is the Universe, Who is in the Universe, Who is the Universe; in Whom is the Soul, Who is in the Soul, Who is the Soul of Man; knowing Him — and therefore the Universe — as our Self, alone extinguishes all fear, brings an end to misery and leads to Infinite Freedom. Wherever there has been expansion in love or progress in well-being, of individuals or numbers, it has been through the perception, realization, and the practicalization of the Eternal Truth — THE ONENESS OF ALL BEINGS. "Dependence is misery. Independence is happiness." The Advaita is the only system which gives unto man complete possession of himself, takes off all dependence and its associated superstitions, thus making us brave to suffer, brave to do, and in the long run attain to Absolute Freedom.

'The Advaita is the supreme realization of the Upanishads as it is the highest water mark of the development of human thought:

'For where there is duality as it were there one sees the other but when the Self is all this, how should one see another. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, IV.5.15.

'When one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else, that is the greatest. When one sees something else, hears some thing else, understands something else, that is the little. The greatest is immortal, the little is mortal. Chhāndogya Upaniṣad, VII.24.1.

'The fundamental belief is the essential unity of all existence.

'Existence is One, Sages call It variously. Rig Veda, I, 164.46.

'All this is verily Brahman. Chhāndogya Upaniṣad, III.14.1.

'The practical Advaita life or its religion begins with the perception of unity between soul and God, or as it is usually put, between the self and the Self, the worship as said in the Gita (IX.15) 'as One', or as Emerson puts it, 'I the imperfect adore my own perfect'. 'That art Thou' (*Chhāndogya Upaniṣad,* VI.8.7.) Dependence on one's higher self is not different from independence.'

Truly, Swamiji established his pet Himalayan centre with the intention of performing a grand and lofty experiment which he revealed in his lecture, 'Is Vedanta the Future Religion?', delivered on 4 April 1900 in San Francisco:

...on the heights of the Himalayas I have a place where I am determined nothing shall enter except pure truth. There I want to work out this idea.... There are an Englishman and an Englishwoman in charge of the place. The purpose is to train seekers of truth and to bring up children without fear and without superstition. *They shall not hear about Christs and Buddhas*

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and Shivas and Vishnus — none of these. They shall learn, from the start, to stand upon their own feet. They shall learn from their childhood that God is the spirit and should be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Everyone must be looked upon as spirit. That is the ideal. ...Sometimes I agree that there is some good in the dualistic method: it helps many who are weak. If a man wants you to show him the polar star, you first point out to him a bright star near it, then a less bright star, then a dim star, and then the polar star. This process makes it easy for him to see it. ...After all, gradual or not gradual, easy or not easy to the weak, is not the dualistic method based on falsehood? Are not all the prevalent religious practices often weakening and therefore wrong? They are based on a wrong idea, a wrong view of man. Would two wrongs make one right? Would the lie become truth? Would darkness become light? ...*However, there are some strong souls who get over that illusion. The hour comes when great men shall arise and cast off these kindergartens of religion and shall make vivid and powerful the true religion, the worship of the spirit by the spirit.* (CW, vol. 8, pp. 140-1; italics added.)

We cannot but re-emphasize the words: '*They shall learn from their childhood that God is the spirit and should be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Everyone must be looked upon as spirit. That is the ideal.*' For the success of this unique experiment, there is a great need for quality input. India must again produce mothers of children like Queen Madalasa, who will rear children with the cradle-song, '*Thou art the Pure One, the Stainless, the Sinless, the Mighty One, the Great One*' (CW, vol. 3, p. 243). ❐

Swamis at picnic

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The Pioneers: Swami Swarupananda

SWAMI SATYAPRIYANANDA

We are referring to the time when Nilambar Mukhopadhyaya's residence housed the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order. The land on which the present Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are located had only just been purchased by Swami Vivekananda. On it stood only a dilapidated house. Some of the Western disciples of Swamiji like Dhiramata, Nivedita and Mira were staying there. One day Swamiji visited that house. He was in an exalted mood. With evident joy he exclaimed, 'Today we have made an acquisition!.' Presently it turned out that the cause of his happiness was that a youth had been formally initiated by him into the monastic Order. The young man was none other than the famous Swami Swarupananda.

Swarupananda's pre-monastic name was Ajay Hari Bandyopadhyaya. He was born on 8 July 1871 at Bhavanipur in Calcutta in a Brahmin family. The parents were worshippers of Lord Krishna and the son too was, by nature, very devoted even from his early years. Born in a Vaishnava family, he imbibed the qualities of piety and humility, and took delight in rendering service to fellow men.

Once during his boyhood days Ajay Hari was passing through a crowded street. An old beggar woman had fallen down, pushed aside by a careless passerby. The few grains that she had acquired by begging lay scattered on the road. Shaken by the loss, the sobbing old woman was picking up the grains from the dusty ground. None had a word of sympathy for her, and none bothered to help her. Visibly moved by the sight and glowing red with anger, the youthful Ajay cried out, 'If God does exist, then what is He doing? Why does He not put an end to all such incidents?' Two or three incidents of this kind left a deep scar on the boy's tender mind. He was deeply shaken by the squalor and wretchedness of the poor folk. The sight of human woe affected his health and spirits, and never for the rest of his life was Ajay free from physical ailments caused by mental anguish. But then he realized that this world-dream — the world idea made up of the pairs of opposites such as happiness and suffering, pleasure and pain, justice and injustice — which we see has at its root ignorance and the ego. This *Māyā*, he determined, he shall conquer. He decided firmly that he shall attain that Wisdom and become free from the contradicting sense of dualities. He shall raise himself to that awareness of non-dual consciousness which the Hindu terms Liberation.

The boy had an insatiable thirst for knowledge too. He read a number of books during his student days. He had a passion for Sanskrit, and with great interest he studied the language, becoming quite a master of it. He was, therefore, very enthusiastic about preserving Vedic religion and heritage. His efforts to gather the youth of the locality and to shape their life on a strong moral basis through a number of uplifting programmes was unparalleled. Not content with all this, Ajay, along with Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyaya — who in later years became well known as a great patriot and scholar—, started a Sanskrit school for imparting the knowledge of the scriptures, the systems of philosophies, grammar, etc. to the general public. Ajay worked hard to raise subscriptions and donations for meeting the expenses for running the school. He also succeeded in getting renowned Pandits to take classes in the school. A monthly magazine named *Dawn*, the Organ of the school, was also started by Ajay, who became its first editor. The income obtained from the sale of this magazine was used to conduct many works beneficial to the society. Ajay inspired and helped his friend Satish Chandra to start in

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1897 a 'Dawn Society' which in due course took over the running of the magazine as its own Organ. As long as Ajay Hari continued to stay in the world, he and Satish Chandra functioned as Joint Editors. The monthly soon proved popular and became very famous. Its main thrust was attacking social repression and denouncing casteism. These describe in a nut-shell the makeup of the subject-matter of this chronicle prior to his coming in contact with Swami Vivekananda.

In the year 1897 Swamiji arrived at Calcutta from the West, and was staying at the Math which was then in Nilambar Mukherjee's house. He had had a highly successful Vedanta-preaching tour in the West and also had a triumphal march through the Motherland. People in large numbers gathered everyday to hear him speak. Swamiji was highly elated to see this and the listeners too were filled with peace and joy. The Indian people looked up to him for resurgence and revival.

One day a group of young men came to see and hear Swamiji, who, with his eloquence and captivating personality, captured the hearts of his listeners. After Vivekananda had spoken to them and as evening was fast approaching, the visitors left one by one after offering their salutation to Swamiji. But one person stayed back. That was Ajay Hari who was about twenty-six years old then. Though he was of frail health, the sparkle in his eyes spoke volumes for the depth of his thought and the acuteness of his wisdom. He introduced himself to Swami Vivekananda without the slightest hesitation and, moved by a divine urge, expressed his desire to take to the life of a Sannyasin. Swamiji did not give a direct answer but just smiled with a benign countenance, being immensely pleased at Ajay Hari's firm resolution. This was Ajay's first meeting with Swamiji. The light had been lit.

Days passed. Ajay Hari was getting disenchanted with worldly life. He saw that his social work too was becoming a bondage. Being married too, there was a tug of war between the demands of the external world and the inner call of the soul. The fire of renunciation raged furiously within him. He again met Swamiji, who spoke about the hardships one has to undergo in taking on the ochre robe. The Swami told him that *Kāminī* and *Kāñcana* (lust and gold) would have to be eschewed in toto, down to the level of thought. At the Guru's bidding, one should not hesitate even to face a venomous snake or to march into the line of a canon. Not yielding to a life of pleasure, one should have to do the Guru's bidding with an unshaken mind giving no scope for consideration that such an act would most certainly mean death. Ajay Hari was undeterred and assured Swamiji that his decision to renounce hearth and home was final and irrevocable, that he would dedicate his life for 'the liberation of the self and the good of the world'. Swamiji was extremely happy. He took him into the Order and allowed him to stay in the monastery.

After a few weeks' stay at the Math as a novice, the most notable moment arrived in the life of Ajay Hari. It was a few days after the full-moon[1]. The hour was the early morning designated as the *Brāhma-muhūrta*. The otherwise vacillating mind of man becomes, at that hour, stilled into an inexplicable tranquillity and filled with fervent devotion for God. Swami Vivekananda was then performing for his would-be Sannyasin disciple the Viraja Homa — the sacred ritual that precedes the Sannyasa ceremony. After the Homa, Swamiji initiated the young Ajay into Sannyasa, the sublime Ashrama which has come down to us from the hoary past of the Vedic age. Ajay Hari was given the name

1. The birthday of Sri Ramakrishna (*Phālgun śukla dvitīyā*) fell on 13 March 1899. Fullmoon was on 27 March 1899 (vide information received from Ms. Gayatri Devi Vasudev, Associate Editor, Raman Publications, Bangalore 560 020). The initiation of Ajay Hari Bandyopadhyaya to sannyasa took place two days later on 29 March 1899.

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Swami Swarupananda. He wrote in his diary, 'On 29th March 1898, Tuesday, A.H.B. [Ajay Hari Bandyopadhyaya] became Swarupananda'.

Swamiji had already initiated his devoted Irish disciple, Miss Margaret Noble, into the vows of Brahmacharya a few days before, on 25 March, and she had come to be known as Sister Nivedita. At the instance of Swamiji, Swami Swarupananda had begun to teach Nivedita the Bengali language from 28 April 1898. He also taught her the elements of the Hindu religion. He thus proved to be not only a teacher in Bengali but also a guide in the realm of spirituality. Swarupananda's meditative and indrawn life influenced Nivedita in a subtle manner and she learnt from seeing him many traits which she acknowledges in her immortal book, *The Master as I Saw Him*. Therein she also pays a sincere tribute to the young Swami: 'And I, reading the *Bhagavad Gita* under his guidance, long afterwards at Almora, was made able to conceive of what we call the love of God as a burning thirst. Under the influence of the Swami Swarupananda, I began seriously the attempt at meditation. And if it had not been for this help of his, one of the greatest hours of my life would have passed by me.'

Mr. and Mrs. Sevier were staying at the high altitude of the Almora hills, bidding a good-bye to the torrid heat of Calcutta which to westerners was unbearable. They were repeatedly requesting Swamiji to bless them through a visit. Swamiji agreed to visit them at Almora with Swami Turiyananda (his brother disciple) and Sadananda (the disciple who had followed him on the very first occasion of his meeting him). He also decided to take Swarupananda with him, thinking that the balmy air of the Himalayas would tone up Swarupananda's health. This journey to Almora on 11 May 1898 included also Nivedita, Jaya, Dhiramata, Mrs. Colonel Patterson (the wife of the American Consul-General in Calcutta) and others.

Swamiji stayed in a bungalow of Lala Badri Shah called Thompson House. In this secluded retreat, Swarupananda had the great opportunity to serve Swamiji, his beloved Guru and to stay close to him. No doubt, he accumulated much that was to stand him in good stead in his spiritual journey. Away from the noise and bustle of Calcutta, Swamiji too had now the time to train the disciple for his future work. Though many of his teachings have not been recorded, the few that have been noted down give us an inspiring glimpse of the greatness of Swamiji's thoughts. Once he said, 'Our method is easily described. It simply consists in reasserting the national life. The national ideals of India are renunciation and service. Intensify her in those channels and the rest will take care of itself.' This dictum has indeed become the *leit motif* of the Ramakrishna Mission.

While at Almora, news of sad import reached the ears of Vivekananda. Dear Goodwin who had taken notes of Swamiji's lectures passed away in his prime. It was owing to Goodwin and his untiring labour that much of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* had become accessible to the future generations. Another sad happening was the demise of Rajam Iyer, the brilliant young founder and editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata* — a tireless worker and an inspired devotee rolled into one. His passing away resulted in the discontinuance of the journal, which was being published from Madras.

Vivekananda was pained at the termination of the magazine he had loved, inspired and motivated. This meant that an immense possibility for the spread of Vedantic ideas had been seriously threatened. He took up the matter with Mr. Sevier. 'Mr. Sevier, you had told me that you will work for the good of India. The water and the heat of Bengal won't suit your health. Why don't you, from a place somewhere near Almora, take up the responsibility of publishing the *Prabuddha Bharata*? It has over 3,000 subscribers. It was first published under my suggestion and it has gradu-

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ally become a notable instrument for the preaching of Vedanta. I do not wish that it is stopped. I give you a suitable editor in Swami Swarupananda, who has the talent, experience and knowledge to run the magazine. With your help and that of Swami Turiyananda, he will be able to conduct it with ease.' Sevier took up Swamiji's idea as a command and a blessing, and shortly *Prabuddha Bharata* (*Awakened India*) started coming out again, serving to illumine the heart of many an aspirant, under the editorship of Swami Swarupananda. As was expected the magazine flourished. Swami Swarupananda with Sevier, who was on the lookout for greater seclusion than available at Almora, selected a plot of land at Mayavati, about fifty miles from Almora with a grand view of the towering snow-capped Himalayas, and purchased it. Swami Swarupananda with the Seviers moved into the Advaita Ashrama on 19 March 1899 on the holy occasion of the public celebration of the birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. Vivekananda's dream of an Advaita Ashrama in the Himalayas was now realized. The editorial office of *Prabuddha Bharata* also was shifted to the new monastery. The printing press too was shifted thereto from the Thompson House. The Seviers stayed in a house not far from the main building of the Ashrama and looked upon Swami Swarupananda verily as their own son. Swami Swarupananda too justified that love showered on him, through his loving heart, keen acumen and dexterity in work.

Swami Swarupananda had thus the blessed privilege of being the Founder-President of the Advaita Ashrama. The phenomenal growth of the Advaita Ashrama, and of the *Prabuddha Bharata* as also the publication of many books during the initial days were all due to the tireless efforts of the Swami. The growth of the *Prabuddha Bharata* was indeed rapid, and great was its appeal to the readers, both Western and Eastern. Swamiji was happy, and he wrote in one of his letters to Brahmachari Harendranath in August 1900, 'Tell Swarup that I am very much pleased with his conducting of the paper. He is doing splendid work.'

An interesting incident shows how deeply Swami Swarupananda was dedicated to the cause of Swamiji. In 1903, a magazine — *Hindustan Review* from Allahabad — in one of its issues carried an article by one Prof. Nelson Fraser entitled 'Swami Vivekananda — A Criticism'. The writer viewed Swamiji compartmentally and only succeeded in misunderstanding and misinterpreting him. Swami Swarupananda did not take this lying down. He instantly despatched to the editor of the magazine a note to clear the wrong notions of the author and of the gullible readers. Under the heading 'Swami Vivekananda — A Rejoinder', it appeared in the next issue of the *Hindustan Review*. The arguments were logical and rational, and clearly brought out the falsity of the implications of the critic. It was a scholarly article and had great depth and insight. It is not surprising that Swami Swarupananda, one of Vivekananda's most ardent disciples, took up the cudgels for his master and righted the wrong. Professor Fraser realized his mistake in incorrectly judging Swamiji and without hesitation wrote to the editor, 'I write to acknowledge the force of the rejoinder which Swami Swarupananda made in your February issue to my article on Swami Vivekananda. It is clear that I did not do him justice.'

Swami Vivekananda, the inspiration behind the whole edifice at Almora, paid a visit to it in 1901 by when it had shifted to Mayavati. It was indeed a memorable event for Swami Swarupananda. Mr. Sevier had suddenly passed away on 28 October 1900. None ever had even an inkling that the dear Sevier, who had done so much for the Advaita Ashrama and who had followed Swamiji to India from England like a true soldier, would breathe his last so soon. His wife, Mrs. Sevier, was no doubt shocked by the demise of her husband and grieved very much. Vivekananda, who had already borne

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the sorrow of the demise of Goodwin, was pained to see another of his chosen few pass away. He specially came up to the cold Mayavati in spite of his failing health to console the bereaved friend and follower.

Swami Swarupananda thus had the blessed opportunity to serve Swamiji again. Swamiji gave him his own ideas and directions as to how the Mayavati Ashrama should progress and Swami Swarupananda carried them out faithfully. Though hard pressed for time by the twin responsibilities of editorship and presidentship, Swarupananda did not forget the memory of his boyhood days — concern for the poor. The illiterate and primitive hill people of Mayavati were very poor and even the bare requirements for eking out a livelihood were lacking. There was absolutely no medical service available to them.

To start with, Swarupananda educated the hill people on modern methods of cultivation. We must not forget that the rains in the hill region are always uncertain — either it is in excess resulting in floods and damage to crops, or it is the hail that destroys the crops, or it is drought. So, the poor had always to depend on the mercy of nature. With assistance from Mr. MacConnell, Swami Swarupananda endeavoured heart and soul to disseminate among the hill-dwellers the know-how in the field of agricultural production. He also started a small school for the hill children. Not content with this he started a charitable dispensary which, later taking the shape of a hospital with many modern amenities, to this day caters to the ailing people of the area. Sometimes, he would go out to Nainital, Almora and other distant places to impart both secular and spiritual knowledge among the local people there. Thus, his feeling heart went out to reach the poor masses in an endeavour to lift them up in every conceivable way.

In 1899, he went on a pilgrimage but on reaching Jaipur, found that there was a big famine in Kishenghar of Rajasthan. Happily for him, he accidentally met Swami Kalyanananda, another monastic disciple of Swamiji, and both of them served the famine-stricken people until, about a year later, Swarupananda had to return to his place of work at Mayavati. An Ashrama too came to be established there.

After the completion of the relief work, Swami Kalyanananda returned to Belur Math. Swami Vivekananda had just then returned from his second visit to the West. He had earlier acquired personal experience of the depth of suffering and helplessness of the monks living at Haridwar and nearby places. So, he told Swami Kalyanananda, 'My boy, can you do something for the ailing monks at Haridwar and Rishikesh? There is none to look after them when they fall ill. Go and serve them.' The disciple readily agreed. Swami Kalyanananda went to Mayavati and sought the help of Swami Swarupananda. Both of them literally begged from house to house in Nainital for one and a half months and succeeded in collecting some money. With the money thus collected they proceeded to Kankhal and started a Sevashrama in June 1901.

In 1902, Swarupananda went to Allahabad for preaching work and inspired many ardent young people. His lectures on Vedanta so began to influence the people of the locality that they, being drawn more and more to the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, started a centre in Allahabad.

Another memorable event in the life of Swarupananda was the earthquake relief at Dharmashala in the Kangra district. On this occasion as well, Swami Swarupananda set out begging for money to bring succour to the victims of the terrible earthquake. His brother-disciple Swami Nirbhayananda and a brahmacharin conducted the relief activities as directed by him.

In spite of all these varied service activities in which he exhibited leonine strength, and uncommon determination and love for humanity, he was equally very particular about his studies and meditation. Even when

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at the Ashrama, which by itself was a very calm and secluded place, he used to venture into the deep forest and, there in a *Kutia* which he had put up, would spend long hours in meditation. One day, when he came out of the *kutia*, he saw a big tiger standing. He again locked himself inside a long time. Hearing of this incident, the Swami was prevailed upon by Mrs. Sevier not to go to the dense forest any more. Instead, she constructed another *kutia* near the Ashrama itself and Swarupananda used that whenever he wanted to be alone. Even today it is known as the 'Swarupananda Kutia' and stands as a mute reminder to the great spiritual practices of the Swami. Often looking at the sublime snow-peaks of the Himalayas, Swarupananda would become lost in the thought of Shiva, the great god of renunciation and meditation. In the company of his brother disciples he would, often and on, go on a tour along the mountain paths to enjoy the bliss and grandeur of the Infinite. The natural scenery of the Himalayas would throw up an infinite variety of thoughts in the mind of Swarupananda, naturally inclined as it was to the contemplation on Brahman.

He was indefatigable in his zeal for spreading broadcast the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He worked untiringly especially to see that the youth and student community became blessed by imbibing the religious ideas and ideals fit for the present age. He was wont to say, 'It is in the student community alone that all our hope for the future rests. Today they, being for a time mad after name, fame, politics, etc., get bound in the iron clasp of matrimony and become forever immersed in worldliness. O, when shall they for the sake of the country learn the lesson of renunciation?' He always placed renunciation as the ideal for the youth.

Swarupananda's devotion for his Guru was immeasurable. He would always like to present himself as one of the least of Swamiji's disciples; in so saying he would feel an extraordinary sense of satisfaction. Coming to know Swarupananda, such remarks from the Swami would only go to enhance once admiration for this self-effacing monk.

An important work the Swami undertook while at Mayavati was the bringing together of some of the material that went to make the literary output of Swami Vivekananda in English. He had even commenced the work of getting a part of it printed. But the illustrious Swami did not live long enough to see the books brought out in their final shape. The Swami's deep scholarship is evident in his beautiful English translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* which, even today, is one of the choice publications of the Advaita Ashrama. His various writings in the *Prabuddha Bharata* on Vedanta are in truth soul-thrilling. Swami Turiyananda, who used to write from America many letters to Swarupananda, wrote to him, 'There are many eager here. If you agree to come, I shall make the preparations.... There is plenty of work here.... If you agree, I shall take the initiative. Come away, all will come out fine.' Swarupananda, who had been specially commissioned by his Guru for the Indian work, did not respond favourably to going to the West.

Swami Swarupananda's interaction with others was marvellous and requires special mention. 'To those who came to him to learn of meditation and *yoga*, he was a most kind and patient teacher, with a wonderful ability to lift and aid. To those who leaned on him in the hour of trial, he gave unfaltering tenderness and protection. And to all alike his life made visible those ideals of purity and austerity which were ever the objects of his passionate quest. Nor were these things in him the expression of that cowardice which too often goes amongst us by the name of spirituality. He had a strong intellectual grasp of all the problems of the day, and was unflinching in his outlook upon their solution.'

In appreciation of Swami Swarupananda, Mrs. Sevier wrote:

In the Swami we had one of the most

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attractive of human characters: the pure-souled idealist who was also a man of sense and practical ability. He was by nature strong and self-reliant, of unruffled temper, suppressing and excluding self in his reckonings and actions. Always on the side of improvement and progress, he won the respect and esteem of all who appreciate disinterested works. None who companied awhile with him, and he was sought after by many, will forget their converse, and the spiritual help he rendered them. Religion was the natural bent of his mind, and though essentially subjective, even his friends seemed to imbibe some of his calm spirit, 'breathing of mountain-tops'....

With Swamiji it [the Prospectus he had framed for Mayavati Ashrama] was no dream to be forgotten, but a vision to be realized. And he entrusted Swami Swarupananda with the venture. Setting aside the difficulties arising from the limitations to which the Sannyasins most often submit, the requirements for such an undertaking were a peculiar sagacity, more than usual foresight, a conciliatory and at the same time a resolute temper, courage, and tenacity. 'As only a burning material can ignite other material, so also only the true faith and life of one man, being communicated to other men, can spread and confirm religious truth. And it is only the spreading and confirmation of religious truth, which improves the condition of man.'

Swami Swarupananda caught this fire from his Guru, and went heart and soul into the enterprise, his quiet nature seeming to veer round and organize itself about new centres of interest and activity, willing to adjust himself to the new idea, eager to welcome fresh light.

The Swami paid two visits to Belur Math from Mayavati. During his first visit itself it did not escape the keen vision of his beloved Guru who wrote: 'Swarupananda had his heart weakened by the constant uphill and downhill. He is here and improving'. During the second visit in 1906 with Mrs. Sevier on works relating to the Ashrama, the doctors pointed out that the Swami was suffering from weakness of the heart. He was given some medicines which proved slightly helpful. But, for the Swami, Vivekananda's work was paramount. So, he returned to Mayavati and plunged himself into the work once again.

He felt that some spot in Almora or Nainital would be better suited for the work of *Prabuddha Bharata* than Mayavati which though away from human habitation was difficult to reach. It was with his mind preoccupied with this thought that on 6 June 1906, the Swami made his way to Nainital via Almora. On the way he got soaked in rain and became the guest of Lala Amar Shah at Nainital. The Swami, the very next day, became quite ill of common cold and fever. That was no inhibition to the worker in the Swami. Looking steadfastly at the picture of Swami Vivekananda for inspiration and taking his seat below the picture mentally recalling that he had forever laid himself at the feet of his Master, he would unceasingly go on giving discourses on spiritual matters to eager visitors. Ever engaged in the good of others, he made little of his own physical condition and engaged himself in the work of preaching. One day his ailment took a turn for pneumonia. On 26 June he nearly lost the faculty of speech. Lala Amar Shah and his friends began to serve the Swami whole-heartedly. Expert physicians were called in. But all this was in vain. On 27 June at 2 p.m. he entered final beatitude. His final flight to his Master's feet was very peaceful. Swami Saradananda in his writing on Swami Swarupananda, says:

> The flower had blossomed. The bees too, greedy for the honey, assembled daily. But quickly, on account of the intense cold of the heavy rains, it dried up. O Divine Mother, is it because ordinary mortals would not understand the great-

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ness of this incomparable blossom that You chose to adorn Your own hair with it to enhance its splendour?

Mrs. Sevier wrote a description of the Swami's last moments for the *Prabuddha Bharata* (August 1906, pp. 142–3): '...he ceased to notice any external objects, gently closed his eyes on this transient world, lapsed gradually into a state of tranquillity and so passed quietly away'. She further wrote: '...we realize as his spirit vanished from its earthly tenement, that—

Death hath not touched it at all,
Dead though the house of it seems.'

An obituary notice, which pictures vividly the role played by Swami Swarupananda, appeared in *Prabuddha Bharata*, June 1906, p. 137:

> Swami Swarupananda had for some years been President of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, and it was mainly owing to his exertion and zealous help that the monastery was started in March of 1899. He brought to the Ashrama an earnestness which compelled attention and all who came under his influence will be most ready to admit the value of his services, who realize how much high principle and constant effort are involved in fashioning the life of, and in maintaining such an institution. The inmates were encouraged to meditate and study, and also to use their energies in various ways for the good of the community. It was under his able editorship that the *Prabuddha Bharata* attained to its present wide circulation. What he sought were the attainment of high ideals, which could have emanated from nothing but the greatest and purest aspirations, and an inextinguishable belief in the truth of Advaita. He cherished meditation as a clue to which the soul must cling in the labyrinth of this mutable and fleeting world, as the means to inward illumination, to all that is true and eternal.... The Swami will be remembered by all for his gentleness, forbearance, and strength of character. Never was the voice of personal anger heard from his lips.
>
> The concluding lines are singularly appropriate to his life:
>
> One who never turned his back,
> but marched breast forward,
> Never doubted clouds would break,
> Never dreamed,
> though right were worsted,
> wrong would triumph,
> Held we fall to rise,
> are baffled to fight better,
> Sleep to wake. ❐

We are ever free if we would believe it, only have faith enough. You are the soul, free and eternal, ever free, ever blessed. Have faith enough and you will be free in a minute.

Everything in time, space, and causation is bound. The soul is beyond all time, all space, all causation.

Therefore proclaim your freedom and be what you are—ever free, ever blessed.

—*Teachings Swami Vivekananda*, p. 75

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The Pioneers: The Seviers

SWAMI SATYAPRIYANANDA

A piece of sweetmeat tastes good whichever way you eat it. The unique lives of Mr. and Mrs. Sevier are a source of inspiration as many times and in as many ways one may recollect them. The events narrated in this article may find themselves repeated in this issue in articles from the pen of other writers as well, but we are sure that the readers, who cherish the ideal for which the Seviers lived, will enjoy some repetition.

It is Hindu tradition that the wife is considered a participator in the religious activities of her husband. She is therefore called a *sahadharmiṇī*. The couple we are about to write about, were indeed Hindus in this respect. Captain John Henry Sevier was a non-commissioned officer in the British army. He and his devoted wife, Mrs. Charlotte Elizabeth Sevier, were earnest seekers after truth. However, the hunger of their soul was not appeased by what they received from the churches. There was too much of doctrines and dogmas and too little of life, they thought. As nature abhors vacuum, even so the spiritual vacuum in the heart has its own effect on the environment. These two noble souls were not alone in this; both America and England were eagerly awaiting a messiah who would bring to them great tidings. Who can deny that the combined pull of these great souls did indeed bring Swami Vivekananda to these Western lands carrying the message of Sri Ramakrishna which is what they of the present age were desperately in need of?

Justifying why he considered that his work in England had been more satisfactory to him than his work in America, Swamiji said:

> The bold, brave, and steady Englishman, if I may use the expression, with his skull a little thicker than those of other people — if he has once an idea put into his brain, it never comes out; and the immense practicality and energy of the race makes it sprout up and immediately bear fruit.... There is less of imagination, but more of work, and who knows the well-spring, the mainspring of the English heart? How much of imagination and of feeling is there! ...their education is to hide their feelings and never to show them. From their childhood they have been educated up to that.... I have seen Englishwomen go to work and do deeds which would stagger the bravest of Bengalis to follow. But with all this heroic superstructure, behind this covering of the fighter, there is a deep spring of feeling in the English heart. If you once know how to reach it, if you get there, if you have personal contact and mix with him, he will open his heart, he is your friend for ever, he is your servant.' [CW, vol. 3, pp. 311–12.]

Perhaps we can say that the British couple did prove that Swamiji's readings regarding their national trait were entirely correct. Swamiji was then — in the spring of 1896 — in England in the course of his second visit there on his first visit to the West. He was delivering his famous Jnana-yoga lectures that captivated his listeners. Swamiji was very popular even on his first visit to London as the guest of Mr. E.T. Sturdy. 'He lectured very eloquently at Princes' Hall, and the next day, the papers were full of the news that a great Indian *yogi* had come to London.' He came again to London but this time 'he established classes and began a real definite work'. Exposed as the British were to Swamiji's message, receptive minds were not wanting in London who would sit for hours to derive the benefit of this rare spiritual guide.

We do not intend to give a list of names but we must mention Miss Josephine MacLeod and the Seviers in the present context. Once Miss Josephine MacLeod remi-

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nisced to Romain Rolland, 'Coming out of one of the Swami's lectures Mr. Sevier asked me, "You know this young man? Is he what he seems?" "Yes". "In that case one must follow him and with him find God." He went and said to his wife, "Will you let me become the Swami's disciple?" She replied, "Yes". She asked him, "Will you let me become the Swami's disciple?" He replied with affectionate humour, "I don't know...."' This was the effect of their meeting Swami Vivekananda. They immediately felt that *here was the man they had been searching for so long*. The idea was deeply imprinted on their mind that *the pursuit of the Advaita philosophy, without any compromise with dualism and its rituals, was alone sufficient to lead to the highest goal*. Such was the mind-set of the Sevier couple, and such too was the strengthening message they received from their would-be Guru.

As they associated with Swami Vivekananda, they came to know more and more of his wonderful personality and within a very short time made him their spiritual guide, placing themselves and their resources unreservedly at his service. In meeting the expense of the Swami in England, the names of Miss F. Henrietta Müller and Mr. E.T. Sturdy should also be mentioned [*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 308]. At this point our mind goes to that incident which we find narrated in the Holy Bible [*St. Matthew*, 19: 16–22]:

> And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is* none good but one, *that is*, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness. Honour thy father and *thy* mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

The Seviers were awake to the message conveyed in this passage from the Bible. They had not merely read it but also imbibed the spirit. They abided by the commandments and wanted eternal life and perfection. However, as a glaring contrast to the young man, they did not lack what was essential and were entirely prepared to sell all that they had to give to the poor — to the neighbour in need — and to follow the great master. The Swami with the unerring vision of a seer, knew their hearts and accepted them as his disciples. We shall see later on that these wonderful disciples too got what was guaranteed to the young man by Jesus Christ in the passage quoted above; they also got the very best of spiritual realizations which Swamiji himself offered to the couple as their life incidents reflect unerringly.

At the end of his strenuous summer work in 1896, the Swami badly needed rest, and the Seviers arranged a six weeks' trip for him to Switzerland, themselves accompanying him and bearing the expenses of the journey. It is difficult to assess whether it was the surrounding that kindled in the Swami grand ideas, or that the inner promptings from the Divine took the Swami along the course of events. Amidst the Alpine scenery was where Swamiji told his disciples of his desire to found a monastery in the Himalayas for the training of students and preachers of Advaita. One cannot but be moved by Swamiji's farsight. He knew well that he would not live to see forty; that therefore the message of his Master was to be transmitted by a succession of disciples, meaning disciples and their disciples, and that this required training these spiritual ambassadors both in the spiritual message of India as suited to Western minds and Western modes of thinking and methods in general; and that India then stood in need

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of Western know-how to raise itself by the blessing of science and technology. A contact between the East and West was therefore essential. But then where? He did not want Westerners to be scorched in the heat of the plains; we may also say that Indians needed to get exposed to a climate similar to that which the West offers; the happy interchange of spiritual ideas needed a suitable natural setting of great beauty and solitude, preferably one in which these lofty ideas first found expression. All this pointed to an ashrama in the Himalayas at an altitude which will be 'congenial'. The idea appealed to the Seviers and their whole life henceforth was devoted to the fulfilment of it.

This tour of Swamiji with the Seviers has two incidents which made a deep impression on Mrs. Sevier. It was from Chamounix, some forty miles off Geneva, that the party had wandered out to a village some miles away where they stayed for two weeks, the Swami, feeling himself at peace and rest as he had seldom been in life. They used to go on strolls in the woods amid scenic beauty. One day, however, as he was walking with his friends, attempting to climb up a hill-side to its top, reciting and translating passages from the Upanishads, he soon began to drop behind, being lost in reverent contemplation. As he was thus walking along, he planted his alpenstock firmly on the ground, when it sank through the deep crevice, and he almost fell over the precipice. It was only a miracle that saved him. No doubt the other members of the party were deeply agitated and concerned about their leaving him alone. So they fervently thanked God for His favour and resolved to take more adequate precautions. At a little mountain chapel on the way back, Swamiji gathered some sweet-smelling flowers and asked Mrs. Sevier to offer them on his behalf at the feet of the Virgin. 'For She also is the Mother,' he explained. He did not do it himself, because he was not a Christian and objections might be raised had he attempted.

The second incident was at Kiel where Swamiji met Prof. Paul Deussen and held discussions. Mrs. Sevier vividly remembered the incident and writing an excellent account of this visit said, 'The vigorous and lucid expositions given by the Oriental exegetist with such firmness of conviction, and yet such delicacy of perception, eventually won over the German savant.' That conversation was on Vedanta, some translation the Professor was making at the time and related topics. No doubt, Mrs. Sevier gathered much harvest from this discussion.

In the winter of that year [1896] the Swami left for India, through historic Italy, and the Seviers accompanied him. It was at Aden where the Swami, addressing a man — a betel-leaf seller — smoking his hookah as '*Bhai*', entered into conversation with him only to have a puff at the pipe himself. Mr. Sevier used afterwards to narrate this story to the Swami's friends, adding, 'I shall never forget that ingenuous look on his face when he said with childlike sweetness, "Brother, do give me your pipe."'

They landed at Colombo on 15 January 1897 and were witness to the unique ovation that greeted their Swami on his return to his motherland after four years of indefatigable work in the West. Unprecedented enthusiasm met him everywhere during the hero's march from Colombo to Almora. The Seviers accompanied him in most of these trips, and often bore the entire expenses of these journeys for the Swami and the whole party. The Swami, on his part, was very vigilant to see that his unique disciples were not overtaxed.

Swami Vivekananda and his party, which included the Seviers, Goodwin, Swamis Shivananda and Niranjanananda, and some of Swamiji's disciples/admirers from Madras — Alasinga Perumal, G.G. Narsimhacharya, B.R. Rajam Iyer and Singaravelu Mudaliar [*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, pp. 217 and 238] —, left Madras by S.S. *Mombasa*.

An interesting incident occurred when they had boarded the ship at Madras. The

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Swami's friends had arranged for green coconuts being stored in the steamer so that Swamiji, who frequently became thirsty because of illness he had contracted from strenuous intellectual work in the West, might slake his thirst. As a huge number of them were being brought in boats for being taken aboard, Mrs. Sevier, who did not know what or whom they were meant for, was annoyed, and asked the Swami, 'Is this a cargo boat, Swami, that they are loading so many coconuts aboard?' The Swami then explained to Mrs. Sevier that this was the thoughtfulness of his devoted friends who had acted on the advice of the physician to Swamiji that he should drink coconut milk instead of water during his week-long journey. They reached Budge Budge on 19 February 1897.

We have in the writings of Swami Virajananda [*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 235] that while at Calcutta, 'Mrs. Sevier used to serve Swamiji at the Seal's house. Swamiji would take his lunch and afternoon tea there. Mr. and Mrs. Sevier came to the Math [Alambazar monastery] as well, once or twice.' The Seviers were taken care of [*Atīter Smṛti*, p. 89] by Swami Niranjanananda, in praise of whom for his pleasing countenance and regal bearing Mrs. Sevier would say with evident pleasure, 'He looks like a prince'. Perhaps, this reflects on her own idea of an ideal person.

Three things were prominent in the thoughts of Swamiji at this time: (1) plans for an Ashrama in the Himalayas, (2) removal of the Math to a permanent and healthy site on the bank of the Ganges, and (3) founding of an Organization that would provide training for his disciples and instruction for the many who came to him, and also serve the people through charitable activities conducted in the right spirit. Swamiji was also concerned with the work in the West under the leadership of two of his brother-disciples. These thoughts were too demanding, and added to that was the heat of the plains! So, on medical advice Swamiji went to Darjeeling on 8 March 1897 with Swamis Brahmananda, Trigunatitananda, Turiyananda, and Jnanananda, Babu Girish Chandra Ghosh, Goodwin, Dr. Turnbull [who had come to India even before Swamiji reached the country], and three of the Madrasi disciples — Alasinga Perumal, G.G. Narasimhacharya and Singaravelu Mudaliar. We find that Mr. and Mrs. Sevier had already gone to Darjeeling by that time.

Swamiji returned briefly to Calcutta on 21 March 1897 to meet the Raja of Khetri who had come to meet the Swami, and left for Darjeeling on the 23rd. Swamiji and his party left Darjeeling for Calcutta on 28 April 1897, and remaining only a week in Calcutta, proceeded to Almora. During this short stay at Calcutta, he initiated four of his disciples into Sannyasa with names Virajananda (Kalikrishna), Nityananda (Jogen), Nirbhayananda (Kanai) and Prakashananda (Sushil). This was the first formal ceremony of ordination into Sannyasa after that of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

Of these four, Swami Virajananda alone was in the party (the others were Swamis Sachchidananda Senior and Vimalananda, and Br. Harendranath) directed by Swamiji (prior to his going to the West for the second time on 20 June 1899) to be sent to Mayavati to assist Swami Swarupananda, the Founder-President of Advaita Ashrama there, in shaping the institution (founded on 19 March 1899) after the directions given by him who was their common sannyasa-guru. Swami Nirbhayananda too came to Mayavati as one of the workers early in the history of the Ashrama when Mrs. Sevier was still there. Swamiji had many expectations from them all and simultaneously had great trust also in that they would live up to those expectations of his.

We have mentioned above Swami Swarupananda whose pre-monastic name was Ajay Hari Bandyopadhyay. One day Swamiji was in an exalted mood and exclaimed, 'Today we have made an acquisition!' He had just initiated the young Ajay

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Hari into the monastic Order. That was on 29 March 1898, many months after the ordination of the first four. We mention these names in the narrative of the Sevier couple because they had close interaction during the early stages in the shaping the Advaita Ashrama.

We left the Seviers at Darjeeling whereto they had gone before Swamiji's going there on 8 March 1897. From there the Seviers went to Simla and stayed there for some three months. We next find the Seviers at Ambala Cantonment where they meet Swamiji again. Though Darjeeling had done much good to Swamiji's shattered health, he went to Almora — another hill station — as we said before, 'to perfect this improvement'. A stay of about three months in Almora helped Swamiji to regain his health to some extent. But, he was still troubled in mind that a place could not be found suitable for starting an Ashrama at Almora even though he had written earlier to his friend, Lala Badri Shah, about his project and requested him to find a suitable site, preferably a whole hill with a view of the snow-ranges, for the Ashrama, and more urgently, a bungalow at Almora for his English friends. So he left Almora on 2 August 1897 and reached Kathgodam, halting for a day at Bhimtal. Then via Bareilly reached on 9 August, he went to Ambala Cantonment on 13 August. That was when the Seviers met him there to discuss what could further be attempted for setting up an Ashrama. On 20 August the Swami and his party which included the Seviers reached Amritsar. But he remained only for four or five hours at the house of one Mr. Todor Mall, Barrister-at-Law. His deteriorating health made it imperative for him to retire without delay to Dharmasala, a delightful hill-station nearby. He went there with Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, and stayed for about seven or eight days. Feeling a little better, Swamiji came back to Amritsar for two days and held religious discussions with some Arya Samajists. On 31 August he left for Rawalpindi (now in Pakistan) but instead of staying there he left immediately for Murree (also in Pakistan) in company with the Seviers and his party, again in quest of health. On 2 September he reached Murree but stayed here briefly. The Seviers had gone to Murree with the intention of accompanying the Swami to Kashmir. Unfortunately however, Mr. Sevier falling ill, the Seviers had to stay behind and Mr. Sevier chose to send a letter to the Swami with the news of this unexpected development. To cover the Swami's journey, the thoughtful Mr. Sevier sent a sum of eight hundred rupees. However, the monk in the Swami argued that being fakirs they would quite naturally spend all that amount whereas just half the sum would be sufficient. So, Swamiji did go to Kashmir and stay for a full month and returned early to Murree in the first week of October 1897.

On 10 October 1897, Swamiji gave vent to the mental condition of Mr. Sevier at this time and his own ideas about a suitable place for the proposed Ashrama:

> Captain Sevier says he is very anxious for a site. He wishes to have a spot near Mussourie, or in some other central place, as soon as possible. The thing is we do not want a place which is too cold, at the same time it must not be too hot. Dehra Dun is unbearable in summer, but pleasant in winter; Mussourie itself is, I dare say, not the right place for many in winter. Above or below it, that is, in British or Garhwal territory, some land is sure to be found. At the same time there must be a supply of water at the place throughout the year for drinking purposes and for everyday use.

Leaving Murree on 16 October with Swamis Achyutananda and Sadananda and the Seviers, Swamiji arrived at Rawalpindi the same day at 5 p.m. On the 20th Swamiji left for Jammu.

On 28 October 1897 the Swami, still in Jammu, heard from Mr. Sevier that he and his wife were in Lahore (now in Pakistan), being well looked after by a Punjabi gentleman. [*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 287] That must

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have been some relief to the Swami. Swamiji's own alternating health and his being forced to go to the hills to recover from the ill-effects of his brief stay in the plains must have made him think about the precarious condition of the Seviers in the plains of India which, together with the seriousness of the Seviers in starting an Ashrama, justified in the Swami's mind Mr. Sevier's anxiety. The biography of Swami Vivekananda states that, besides recouping his lost health, another reason for the Swami's going to Dehra Dun, Dharmasala and Kashmir was 'to find a suitable plot of land for Mr. and Mrs. Sevier to buy, where an Ashrama could be started for the training of the Brahmacharis; but no suitable plot could be found there.' [*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 294]

It was nearing the end of November 1897. Swamiji had come to Delhi after touring many places, giving lectures and conversing with visitors. Thereafter, together with Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, his brother-monks, and disciples, Swamiji visited all the monuments and ruins associated with the past glory of the Moghul emperors, which are scattered around Delhi within a few miles' radius. [*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 295] One who accompanied him says: 'He vivified the past before us. Indeed, we forgot the present in the past and lived with dead emperors and mighty kings of old.' After visiting a few more places Swamiji came back to Calcutta in the third week of January 1898.

By then Mr. and Mrs. Sevier had taken up residence in Almora after leaving Darjeeling, going to Simla and making a tour of India. They had been asking the Swami to go to Almora again. Accordingly, on the evening of 11 May 1898, a large party left Calcutta for Almora. The beauty of the scenery enchanted the Western disciples as they made their way along the winding hill paths. On 17 May (16 May, according to the Mayavati Diary), the party reached Almora, where, the Swami, his brother-disciples (Swamis Turiyananda and Niranjanananda) and his sannyasin disciples (Swamis Sadananda and Swarupananda) were the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, at Thompson House. His Western disciples stayed nearby in what is now called the Oakley House. On 30 May, the Swami, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, left Almora for a week, partly in search of seclusion, and partly on business, in connection with the possible purchase of an estate for his monastery. But this possibility too came to nothing.

This was a period of great distress to the Swami. News of several deaths reached him: of Mrs. Bagley, his admirer and friend, in connection with which he wrote a letter on 20 May; of Pavahari Baba which news he received on his return to Almora on 5 June; of his dear disciple J.J. Goodwin on 2 June; and of B.R. Rajam Iyer, Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, then published from Madras, in May 1898. The magazine had ceased publication after the June 1898 issue.

Wishing to revive the magazine, the Swami told the Seviers that here was an opportunity for a great work — the kind of work that they contemplated doing. Said he to Mr. Sevier, 'I am giving you a capable editor. Swami Swarupananda has particular experience in that line, and with the help of yourself and Swami Turiyananda, he will easily be able to run it.' That was how he intended to utilize his 'acquisition' and his devoted British couple — in running the magazine and in setting up an Ashrama. But where?

It was agreed that the *Prabuddha Bharata* office should be transferred from Madras to Thompson House, the rented house in Almora where the Seviers had been staying. The printing press and materials were brought up from Calcutta, and the first issue from the Almora office was published in August 1898, under the editorship of Swami Swarupananda. There was a break of just one month and the circumstances quite justify it. Mr. Sevier acted as manager. He also met all the initial expenses in connection with the purchase and transport of the hand-press, the type, paper, and other things needed!

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As far as having a monastery in a cool climate was concerned, that project had been taken up in earnest by Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, who were on the lookout for a suitable tract of land in the hills of Kumaon. What is meant by the word 'suitable'? A monastery in a secluded region of the Himalayas, where East and West could meet on an equal footing of love and unity of purpose, exchange with each other their own highest ideals, and practise Advaita teaching. At a height of about 7000 feet above sea-level, since he did not want to make it too difficult for his Western disciples coming to work for his cause in India, by forcing on them the Indian mode of living in the fiery heat of the plains. At Kashmir Swamiji had left the matter in the hands of the Seviers, he himself having found out that none of the places he came across was suitable. With Swami Swarupananda the Seviers made a tour into the interior of Almora District. In the course of an extensive and diligent search they came upon the beautiful estate of Mayavati with its thickly wooded hills spread over an area ranging from 6000 to 7000 feet in elevation, the Ashrama being at 6400 feet. Fifty miles east of Almora, it commanded a magnificent view of the snow ranges. They decided at once that it was *the* spot for starting the proposed home for *Prabuddha Bharata*. The purchase was promptly made and they established it as their retreat on 19 March 1899, the day of the public celebration of the birth of Sri Ramakrishna. The press was moved there forthwith.

It was the spring of 1899. The Seviers wanted the Swami to go up to Mayavati to give them spiritual initiation. Sister Nivedita wrote on 26 March 1899:

> The Seviers want him [the Swami] to come to their new place and initiate them; and as he dreads the mountains and is anxious to do, I think perhaps he will go to Lucknow and do it for them. Won't that be lovely for them? [Quoted in *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 450]

However, on 11 April Sister Nivedita wrote:

> I asked him [Swamiji] about going to the Seviers as he had promised, and he said he was not going.

The reason was quite simple. Mr. Sevier who had neuralgia could not risk another attack by coming down to Lucknow. And Swamiji too was not in any better health to go up the mountains. Thus, unfortunately for Mr. Sevier, his wish could not be fulfilled, since he passed away on 28 October 1900, while the Swami was in the West.

The pioneer's lot is always a hard one. In a time-worn hill-house high in the forested Himalayas, the Seviers and an ochre robed Sannyasin — Swami Swarupananda —, lived in the wild mountain region of Mayavati under instructions from Swamiji, charged with establishing an Advaita Ashrama. They were making additions and alterations to the existing buildings. As we have seen earlier, it was on an appeal from these pioneers, that Swamiji, before his going to the West for a second time on 20 June 1899, had left instructions that Swamis Virajananda, Sachchidananda, Vimalananda and Br. Harendranath should go to Mayavati to assist them. One evening in August 1899 Swamis Sachchidananda and Vimalananda reached Mayavati. The next morning, after giving the inmates of the Ashrama anxious moments, Swami Virajananda and Br. Harendranath, who had lost the way, arrived. The sturdy band of monks, with Swami Swarupananda at their head, cheerfully underwent the hardships and privations to make the place a centre of work as well as contemplation.

Captain Sevier, whom all at the Ashrama including Mrs. Sevier used to call 'Pitaji' (meaning 'venerable father'), was the manager of the Ashrama, Swami Vimalananda the assistant manager, and Swami Swarupananda the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*. Swami Sachchidananda took charge of the construction and repairs of the buildings and Swami Virajananda was in charge of making roads, clearing the jungles and the like —

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what Swami Virajananda termed the public works department. Strenuous work for two or three hours with axe, spade and hoe made Swami Virajananda extremely hungry and he had occasionally to raid Mrs. Sevier's cupboard for anything that he may find to fill up the vacuum. A happy group with a mission entrusted to them, they faced remarkably what would ordinarily be called hardship. At times the Captain in his manager's work was worried over the accounts when Mrs. Sevier would tactfully extricate him from his difficulties by paying up the little discrepancies!

Captain Sevier's life was extremely austere, not unlike that of a monastic, and he toiled hard for the Ashrama. Even in appearance he resembled a monk: He wore a Dhoti draped in the South Indian manner and all his clothing was dyed a light ochre. That a European, born and brought up amidst luxury, could in his later years so completely accept the Indian mode of thought and way of life, and for the sake of his Guru voluntarily embrace poverty and austerity, rendered the monks speechless with wonder.

Over a period of years Captain Sevier had suffered a chronic illness (urinary troubles), and eventually his health took a bad turn. Lending a deaf ear to the urging of others, he consistently refused to travel to Almora for treatment by physicians. 'Throughout my life,' he protested, 'I have never stayed continuously in one place for more than six months, and I came here with the determination that I would on no account leave Mayavati.'

Firm in his resolve and depending solely on the will of the Lord, he quietly bore the pain of his malady on his deathbed. At length this dedicated devotee attained peace supreme and was released from the body on 28 October 1900. As had been his wish, on the bank of the stream that runs below the Ashrama, his body was cremated and obsequies performed in accordance with the Hindu custom: 'covered with garlands, the Brahmins carrying the body and the boys chanting the Vedas'. Swamiji was then in Egypt and a feeling gripped him that the good Captain, of whose ill-health he had news, had departed from this life. He booked his passage on the earliest available steamer bound for Bombay hoping to see his dear Mr. Sevier alive, and arriving at Belur Math on 9 December 1900, heard that Captain Sevier had become one more martyr to the cause. Mrs. Sevier bore it all calmly, a true Advaitin that she was, and this brought forth from Swami Vivekananda the reaction, 'Lord bless her, dear brave soul!' A very brief obituary note appeared in *Prabuddha Bharata*, November 1900, p. 175:

> It is with the deepest sorrow that we announce the passing away on Sunday the 28th October last of Mr. J.H. Sevier, the joint founder of the Advaita Ashrama, and a tried friend of India and the Indians. A staunch follower of the highest Vedic philosophy, with the characteristic liberality and catholicity of mind towards every other form of faith of a genuine Advaitin, a man human and noble, and a heart loyal and true, while his absence from us in the body is loss irreparable to us, ours is not the wish to drag him back to the concerns of this shadow existence by selfish thoughts. May he, if Karma's debts should remain, find in a higher form of life, — as we doubt not he has — conditions and opportunities for a greater and fuller realization of the Eternal Truth, the Ever-permanent One Being towards Which his highest aspirations were here directed; and may the harmony of *'Hari Aum Tat Sat,'* which he loved to hear and meditate upon, and which vibrated around him in forceful, peaceful waves during his freedom from the flesh, sent out with the whole-souled earnestness of devoted and loving hearts, accompany him in his pilgrimage to a higher sphere and act as a guiding force in shaping his further evolution to the Perfect! *Hari Aum Tat Sat!*
>
> By special desire expressed most emphatically all through life his remains were cremated, with Vedic rites, with new silk cloth, ghee, sandal-wood, camphor, incense, &c.

The year 1901 started with an eager expectation by the Mayavati inmates of the visit

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of Swami Vivekananda to Mayavati in order to console Mrs. Sevier. He had arranged to travel by train to Kathgodam, but then Mayavati was another sixty-five miles beyond, accessible only by narrow trails over rugged mountain terrain. Further, it was the winter season. The *Life of Swami Vivekananda* presents [vol. 2, pp. 562-77] the details of the adventurous journey to Mayavati from Kathgodam, details of the stay at Mayavati from 3 January 1901 to the noon of 18 January, and Swamiji's journey back via Pilibhit. As our attempt has been to focus on the Seviers, we narrate only the prelude which indicates clearly how Mrs. Sevier, though she had suffered a great personal loss, was quite alert to the situation at Mayavati and exhibited a unique concern for Swamiji's comfort during his journey to Mayavati.

Swamiji had sent Mrs. Sevier a telegram informing that he would be coming, and stating that the exact date would be made known before starting. Mrs. Sevier was well aware of the many difficulties. Firstly, Mayavati was situated in the midst of a forest, many miles from the nearest town or village, and so news was slow to travel. Secondly, there was not even a *katcha* road, and one had to travel along only bridle paths that snaked up and down the hills. So, to enable the Mayavati inmates to make the necessary arrangements, Mrs. Sevier asked Swamiji to inform her the date of his arrival at least eight days in advance. However, as it usually happens especially when it is important, the telegram reached Mayavati only on the 25th intimating that Swamiji would be reaching Kathgodam on the 29th! However, Swami Virajananda rose to the occasion and managed to reach Kathgodam all prepared and on time though it meant great hardship.

The disciples of Swamiji and Mrs. Sevier were all happy to have Swamiji amidst them. When Swamiji left Mayavati by noon of 18 January 1901 little did they realize that it was to be their last meeting with the great inspirer. The news of Swamiji's passing was a great blow to the inmates of the Ashrama at Mayavati and specially to Mrs. Sevier. Yet she was quite aware of what she ought to do under the circumstances. Accordingly in 1903 Mrs. Sevier executed a Trust Deed for the Mayavati Ashrama. She well remembered the Prospectus of Advaita Ashrama which Swami Vivekananda had laid down in a letter to Swami Swarupananda in March 1899, and made a distinct stipulation in it that no ritual except the Viraja Homa (the ceremony in connection with the taking of the vow of renunciation of the world) should be performed on the Trust property. As for spiritual practises, she stated that 'any member of the said Advaita Ashrama shall be at liberty to use beads in private and to keep pictures in his room so long as they are not worshipped or made the subject of external ceremonial provided also that Sadhana if practised shall consist of Japam or Astanga Yoga or unselfish work without attachment or the "neti neti" method.' The Trust Deed also amply reflects her Advaitic vision based as it was on many Upanishadic statements and the *Gita*.

With the exception of visits to England in 1901 to attend to her deceased husband's affairs, and again in 1908, Mrs. Sevier lived mostly at Mayavati till her departure in April 1916, paying occasional visits to Calcutta, Benares, and other places, where she had the companionship of Western fellow disciples also working in India for her (India's) uplift or on a visit to this country. She also invited many distinguished persons and many of her Western friends to come and visit Mayavati. Special mention should be made of Dr. and Mrs. J.C. Bose, Sister Nivedita, Sister Christine, Ananda Mohan Bose, and Mr. C.R. Das and his family.

It was on 25 September 1901 — during Mrs. Sevier's first visit to England — that Swamiji wrote to Sister Christine emphasizing how very badly the work at Mayavati needed the presence of Mrs. Sevier:

> I am soon expecting Mrs. [Charlotte] Sevier though. Her work is needing her. Her beautiful home in the Himalayan forests is a temptation, especially now when a huge tiger is roaming in

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her compound and killed a horse, a buffalo, and her pair of mastiffs in broad daylight; a number of bears [are] playing havoc with her vegetable garden; and lots of porcupines [are] doing mischief everywhere!!! She went out of the way to buy land in a forest — she and her husband liked it so much. (*CW*, vol. 9, p. 165)

Since the passing away of Mr. Sevier in 1900 and the *mahasamadhi* of Swami Vivekananda in 1902, it was Swami Swarupananda who took special care of Mrs. Sevier. So, it was another tremendous blow to her when the Swami suddenly died of pneumonia in the year 1906. Swami Saradananda, the then Secretary of the Order, went to Mayavati to comfort her. Swami Virajananda, the second President of Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati, was as devoted in his services to Mother as Swami Swarupananda, and her life at Mayavati, as also at Shyamala Tal, another lovely retreat in the Himalayas which she helped to found in 1914, was made happy in all ways. On considerations of health and in order to look after her sister, she finally left India in April 1916 by *S.S. Malwa*, after staying at the Ashrama at Shayamala Tal for a year.

It was War-time, and Mrs. Sevier, back in England, had to do much hard work, which had its inevitable effect on her health. Nevertheless she kept herself in close touch with the Ashramas (at Mayavati and Shyamala Tal) and the movement that were so dear to her, sending regular contributions for the maintenance of the Mayavati Ashrama (and the other Ashramas she had endowed), until failing eye-sight and persistent heart troubles made communication with the outside world impossible for her. In her letters she signed herself 'Old Mother'.

Her life at Mayavati was a unique one. It was a life of consecration and service. She combined in her life the best of Eastern and Western nunhood. She signed herself in her articles in *Prabuddha Bharata*, and not only believed in it as a creed, but also translated it into practice. Her articles amply bear out the fact that she, in truth, was an out and out Advaitin. She was intensely active, and wished the Ashrama members also to be so. Despite her comparatively frail body she was seen engaged in something or other. Her cheerful countenance was an index to the serenity of her mind. Her very presence was a continual benediction. She looked after the garden and orchards and kept the whole place spotlessly clean.

The Mayavati Ashrama, in those early days, had three buildings situated at different heights: the topmost one was the Ashrama proper, a double-storeyed building where the monastic inmates lived and worked. Of the other two buildings, the upper one, being sunnier, was Mrs. Sevier's winter residence and served as the guest-house in summer; the lower one was Mrs. Sevier's summer residence. For safety's sake it was arranged that she should sleep at night in the Ashrama building, where she occupied a corner room on the upper storey fitted with a bath.

At the Ashrama she dressed herself in the Indian saree, but when going out visiting — as she did occasionally — she put on her English dress. She got up quite early, and after meditation left her room at daybreak for her bungalow. With the help of a servant she attended to her household duties, keeping the whole place spotlessly clean, cooked something for herself, while some of the things cooked at the Ashrama were sent down to her at noon. Everyday one of the Ashrama inmates was invited by turn to her afternoon tea, after which she came up to the Ashrama for joining in the game of croquet. Latterly, owing to her heart condition she had to be helped in making the ascents. In the intervals of household work she assisted in the editing of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, or *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, or in reading proofs of these or of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, while sometimes she contributed articles to this magazine. Two little brochures, *A Breath from the Himalayas* and *In the Land of the Mummies*, were subsequently published out of these articles. She wrote a delightful style. The evening of the Ashrama was devoted to medi-

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tation, after which there was supper in which Mrs. Sevier joined. Before retiring to her room she would read out to the Ashrama members, by the fire-side, interesting portions from books or periodicals. She was a charming conversationalist.

Interesting disputes would arise during the editing of the works of Swami Vivekananda in which Mrs. Sevier assisted Swami Virajananda. Careful editing of Swamiji's writings and speeches was necessary from beginning to end. Swami Virajananda would sit down with this task immediately after his tea in the morning and in one unbroken stretch would continue to work until noon. Then, in the afternoon, Mrs. Sevier and Swami Virajananda would review together the morning's production. Again, at night after his evening meal, Swami Virajananda would arduously carry on these labours until eleven o'clock. There was however a slight difference in emphasis in the editing. The Swami always endeavoured perfectly to maintain the *idea* behind Swamiji's words, even though the language might in some places not be elegant. This was not acceptable to Mrs. Sevier who herself wrote a delightful style as we mentioned a while ago. She would therefore become quite annoyed and emphatically exclaim, 'To bring from Swamiji's mouth *such* English, which people will criticize, is certainly not proper!' At times the disagreement between them would almost turn into a quarrel — yet at the root of the matter was the deep love both held for Swamiji!

Mrs. Sevier was sweetness and love personified. All who came in contact with her testified to this. The poor rustic folk of the neighbouring villages as well as old Ashrama servants spoke of her as 'a goddess'. It was a fitting tribute to her kindness and active sympathy for all. She would present them with some vegetables from the kitchen garden — in which she herself worked — and in cases of need give them substantial pecuniary help. This last she would manage in secret if there was any opposition. She would prescribe simple medicines for the sick poor — an office which was afterwards taken over by the Charitable Dispensary which she helped to start. This Dispensary with its Indoor Ward soon became a great boon to thousands of village people for many miles around. It also proved to be the precursor to the Mayavati Charitable Hospital which is rendering great medical service to poor sick people within a radius of 64 kms.

Even animals had a share in her love. The Ashrama cattle would run to her and form a ring around her as soon as they heard her familiar voice, and she would talk to them as if they were human beings! The pony Mongal also got his due. Not even the goats were forgotten. She would keep vegetable peelings for these dumb creatures and distribute them among all. She remembered the animals in her letters from England, and every letter mentioned 'pats to Glama!'—a plain looking Bhutia dog and a special favourite of hers, witnessing whose death at Mayavati, she was visibly moved.

Her kindness to the Ashrama inmates was exceedingly great. Many a time she helped them through their difficulties with motherly advice and guidance. Such also was her attitude to other monastic members of the Order who were guests of the Ashrama. Mayavati being on one of the principal routes to Manasarovar and Mt. Kailas, the Ashrama has always drawn some of them. She would look to their comforts during their stay, and saw to it that they were provided with the necessities of their journey when they left. It was a habit with her. Swami Shuddhananda, as the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, relates the following anecdote pertaining to the Almora days:

> One afternoon I went to visit the Seviers when it was tea time. I was rather shy with them. Mrs. Sevier eagerly pressed me to join them at tea, and coming to know that I was unaccustomed to the use of knife and fork earnestly requested me to use my fingers, and after the tea gave me a towel to wipe my hands.

Again speaking of his first visit to Mayavati,

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he says:

> I had my turn at the afternoon tea twice. As far as I remember, she prepared *blanc mange* for us, and expressed regret that she could not in that jungle feed me with the delicacies of Calcutta.

Every year she made Christmas presents to the Ashrama inmates and servants, and this tender practice was continued even while she was in England. When she returned from a visit to England, she would remember to bring back something or the other for the Ashrama.

She had deep veneration for Sri Ramakrishna. One day she was asked how, as an Advaitin, she looked upon him. Without a moment's hesitation she said, 'Of all the perfect men that have appeared on earth I consider him the greatest'. That was her way of putting *a-dvaita* ('without a second', in the language of the Holy Mother used in her letter to Swami Vimalananda in August 1902, or as having 'no peer', in the language of Swamiji). She contributed a large sum towards the construction of the Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order.

Swami Vivekananda, who addressed Mrs. Sevier as 'Mother' from his first meeting with her wrote of her to Miss Margaret Noble as follows:

> Mrs. Sevier is a jewel of a lady, so good, so kind. The Seviers are the *only* English people who do not hate the *natives*.... Mr. and Mrs. Sevier are the only persons who *did not come* to patronize.

He also wrote to Mr. Sturdy in November 1899:

> I remember in England Capt. and Mrs. Sevier, who have clad me when I was cold, nursed me better than my own mother would have, borne with me in my weakness, my trials; and they have nothing but blessings for me. And that Mrs. Sevier, because she did not care for honours, has the worship of thousands today; and when she is dead millions will remember her as one of the great benefactresses of the poor Indians.

Swami Saradananda had some very nice words in appreciation of her role in the Ashrama which we find in the Diary Entry of 17 October 1913: 'the life & soul of this Ashrama since its very start".

Making a resumé of the past three years, the recorder of the Diary in his entry of 30 November 1913 observed: 'Mother [Sevier] spent all this money [about Rs. 4500] and suffered endless trouble and disturbances only to have the *Life of Swamiji* finished by him [Frank]. Blessed be Mother and her devotion to Swamiji!'

The following lines from Swami Shuddhananda neatly sum up her character:

> From the little opportunity I had of associating with Mother [Sevier] I noticed in her a boundless devotion to Swami Vivekananda and a profound sympathy for every kind of work inaugurated by him. Particularly she was enthusiastic about the preaching of Advaita Philosophy. In spite of her age she took great pains to regulate her life according to its principles, and practised rigorous self-discipline, austerity and self-sacrifice for its sake. She spent money unstintedly for the cause of Swami Vivekananda, specially for the preaching of Advaita, and gave herself up heart and soul to it. She had no issue, so her maternal instincts naturally flowed in abundance towards the disciples and admirers of Swami Vivekananda and towards all those who had associated with him. Such an example of complete transformation at the Swami's touch is rare.

She was exceptionally intelligent and could size up a man at a glance. Her opinion on contemporary events was always sound. The day the mails brought her news of the outbreak of the Great War, she gravely remarked that it was the beginning of a world-wide conflagration. She exactly predicted which side each of the great powers would take and which side would win. She was capable of deep emotions, but she always kept them under restraint, a British trait which we recalled in the beginning in the words of Swamiji. She was a lover of beauty in nature and would not allow the Ashrama

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trees to be cut, or flowering plants to be denuded of their floral wealth. There was a natural dignity in her bearing, and everything about her was sweet and graceful, which we told earlier was reflected in her appreciation of Swami Niranjanananda's similar traits. She loved humour, and used to see the sunny side of life.

She was forgiving to a degree. A young man staying for some time at the Mayavati Ashrama had the foolishness to abscond with a few hundred rupees of the Ashrama money. He was arrested by the police and hauled up for trial. Mother Sevier looked at the unfortunate incident from quite a different angle, and sincerely wished that he might be let off. The boy, she pleaded, had committed the offence through mistake, but it would be blasting his life if he was branded with a jail sentence at such an early age. There were scores of such instances of her forgiveness. She believed in moral conquest rather than in brute force.

In her letter of 18 October 1930, Constance M. Michell, a niece of Mrs. Sevier, wrote, 'Mrs. Sevier's heart is very bad now and frequently she gets bad attacks but up to now her wonderful vitality has pulled her through, though as you will understand each attack leaves her a little weaker and now I am afraid she is in a very low state...'. It was Mrs. Sevier's 83rd birthday. She was bed-ridden and had a poor eyesight too. She seldom talked sense, but when she talked sense, it was of India and her work. This letter was quickly followed by another of 24th which gave the bad news, 'the next day [19th] the attacks came on more severe than before and on Monday the 20th a bad attack started about a quarter to 11 A.M. and she passed away at a quarter to 2 P.M. Mrs. S. was quite conscious upto within 10 minutes of her death, and she suffered a lot from the commencement of the attack until within 10 minutes before the end when she passed peacefully beyond our care.' She continued, 'The funeral was on Thursday, October 23rd. We had a short service in our Church (where Mrs. Sevier always enjoyed coming with us as long as her health permitted). Then we went to Golden Green where her body was cremated and her ashes thrown to the winds as was her own special wish (and *not* ours)! My Aunt left a wish for no flowers, she had often told us she did not want a lot of money spent on flowers, but of course she always loved nature in every form and we got one lovely Cross made of white Chrysanthemums and Harissei lilies which we wanted to be from everybody, for every soul she met was the better for having met her, and on the Cross we put a card with the following words on it. "Charlie," "Aunt Charlie," "Mother," — with fondest love. "Charlie" would include her own sisters and old friends. "Aunt Charlie" would include her nieces and her more recent friends (who all called her Aunt Charlie)! and "Mother" would include her Indian friends, so we hope no one will feel left out.... I had a letter from someone this morning who knew Mrs. Sevier very well and she says, "Mrs. Sevier never preached the religion, she lived it," and what better could we say or hear of anyone.' While in England, Miss MacLeod once asked her whether she had not felt bored during her long stay at Mayavati. In a significant reply Mrs. Sevier had revealed the content of her life-long *sadhana*, 'I used to think of Swamiji' (vide Mayavati Diary, 4 December 1930).

In one of the early meetings between Swami Vivekananda and Mrs. Sevier, the Swami had asked her, 'Don't you feel like coming to India? If you do come, I will give you the very best of all that I have experienced?' And she shared this rare gift with her equally devoted and dedicated husband. True to Advaita, neither cared for the body, how it lived or how it died, and neither desired any memorial at the site of the cremation of the mortal remains. Austere, devoted to self-improvement, and dedicated to the service of the divine in all, both lived a unique life, and on the death of the body, they left behind for posterity a shining example of how a life is usefully lived. ❐

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Swami Virajananda at Mayavati

SWAMI SATYAPRIYANANDA

We present in a later article brief life-sketches of the past Presidents of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, including Swami Virajananda's. In the following pages we have brought together memorable events concerning Swami Virajananda, the second President of Advaita Ashrama, while he was at Mayavati, as a worker of the Ashrama, as its President, as a visiting monk from his Ashrama at Shyamala Tal, and later as the President of the Ramakrishna Order. Of necessity we have related some events to cover the interim period.

As a Worker at Mayavati

It was one evening in August 1899. The venue, Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati established on 19 March 1899. Swami Swarupananda, the Founder-President of the Ashrama, and Captain and Mrs. Sevier had been living in this Ashrama under instructions from Swami Vivekananda giving shape to his vision of an Ashrama entirely dedicated to Advaita. The guideline they had before them was the Prospectus of the Advaita Ashrama communicated by Swamiji in a letter to Swami Swarupananda in March 1899. Their asset, the blessings of Swami Vivekananda and an indomitable will to accomplish the task at whatever price it might demand.

The day in question, several monks were expected to arrive at Mayavati to join the team in its Himalayan effort. That arrangement had been made by Swamiji himself before his departure to the West for the second time on 20 June 1899. Swamis Virajananda, Vimalananda, Sachchidananda (Senior) and Brahmachari Harendranath were eagerly expected, but the time for their intended arrival had long since passed. Black clouds above, rain drizzling all around, the chill in the air, and the wild life in the mountains — all these brought concern to the motherly heart of Mrs. Sevier. The Captain and Swami Swarupananda were not any less anxious. They had already arranged for the houseboy to look carefully and report to them if there was anyone coming to the Ashrama. Tense moments were spent. Seconds ticked by at intervals that seemed to be as long as hours.

At long last Swamis Sachchidananda and Vimalananda arrived, followed by porters bearing their luggage. But, of Swami Virajananda and Br. Harendranath there was no sign. 'They set out ahead of us and we fell far behind,' was all Budo Baba (Swami Sachchidananda) could say for sure. 'We thought surely they would await us at Lohaghat, and when we did not find them there, we surmised that they had pushed on farther up the trail. Where have they gone? Have they lost the way?' The thought of wild animals on the prowl came back with great impact. The night was spent in intense apprehension.

On the morrow Swami Virajananda and Harendranath arrived safe and sound. Near Lohaghat they had lost their way and after a hazardous detour, had returned at nightfall to whence they started. Without proceeding further following a judicious decision, they had taken shelter for the night in the hermitage of a monk.

Looking about him Virajananda recalled his boyhood wish — the same Himalayas to which more than a decade earlier he and Khagen (Swami Vimalananda) had longed to run away to live a life of religious austerity. He was immensely delighted — and we imagine Swami Vimalananda too felt likewise — to see that their boyhood wish had come true at last.

Japa and meditation, the two essential pursuits of a monk, were what Virajananda had long resolved to do, but to these was added untiring service at the behest of his

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Sannyasa Guru. Swami Virajananda later reminisced:

> At that time we all lived in the bungalow below. Captain Sevier was the manager of the Ashrama, Vimalananda the assistant manager, and Swarupananda the Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*. Budo Baba took charge of the construction and repairs of the buildings, and my work was something like that of the public works department — to make roads, clear the jungles and the like.
>
> After the morning tea I would go out with axe, spade and hoe and work hard for two or three hours. As a result of this I used to feel very hungry and would occasionally raid Mother's (Mrs. Sevier's) cupboard. At Lohaghat, the nearest town in the heart of this vast wilderness, there was extreme difficulty obtaining foodstuffs, but we were a happy group and did not at all consider hardship as hardship.

A little more than a year elapsed this way when, on 28 October 1900, Captain Sevier, whose life was extremely austere and whose determination to stay at Mayavati was as strong as he was austere, passed away bearing quietly the pains of his malady on his deathbed. That was a big blow to both Mrs. Sevier and Swami Swarupananda, no doubt, but that feeling was shared alike by all the inmates — monastic and lay servants — who all had been addressing the Captain as 'Pitaji' and Mrs. Sevier as 'Mother'.

It was primarily to console the bereaved Mrs. Sevier that Swami Vivekananda decided to come to Mayavati despite his failing health. There was also in him the eagerness to visit the Ashrama that was so near to his heart. Though Mrs. Sevier had expressed her desire that Swamiji's intimation regarding his intended date of arrival at Kathgodam should reach her at least eight days earlier, so as to enable the Ashramites to make adequate arrangements to fetch Swamiji therefrom, that intimation reached Mayavati quite late. There was no time — humanly, that is — to arrange for carriers for Swamiji. Virajananda, however, quickly rose to meet this crisis. Swiftly he made the rounds of the nearby villages and, with tremendous effort and for enormous fees, secured the needed porters. With these men, he then walked with all speed to Kathgodam, covering the sixty-five miles in only two days — what normally takes three days — and arrived at midnight on the 28th of December, well on time!

In the early morning hours Swamiji's train pulled in. Accompanying him were Swami Shivananda and Swamiji's first disciple, Swami Sadananda (Gupta Maharaj). Spying Virajananda patiently waiting at the station, Swamiji was overjoyed. Later, when he heard of Virajananda's resourcefulness in securing porters and traversing this long distance in only two days, Swamiji excitedly exclaimed, 'Bravo! Here is a true disciple!'

After wiring Swami Swarupananda, Swamiji himself had doubted if it would be possible for anyone to come from Mayavati in so short a time. Therefore, he had also telegraphed Badri Shah, a devotee in Almora, who dispatched to Kathgodam his brother's son Lala Govindalal Shah to receive Swamiji. Swamiji had planned to proceed to Almora in case no one turned up from Mayavati. However, Swamiji found before him both Lala Govindalal Shah and an extremely tired Virajananda. Himself feeling feverish, Swamiji decided to stay the day at Kathgodam, and the next day all of them started for Mayavati.

Several interesting things happened on this adventurous journey. There were repeated occasions for Swami Virajananda to grow in concern on account of Swamiji's fragile health. There was also the occasion when Swamiji sympathetically allowed the litter carriers to halt awhile 'for a smoke and a cup of tea' at a rustic wayside shop. Virajananda, who well knew the nature of the adamant hill porters, had earlier cautioned Swamiji that once the carriers stopped they would be unwilling to resume their journey causing great delay making it impossible to reach the intended destination before nightfall. Dusk was enveloping all around and snow had begun

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to fall, and these spelled disaster: they had to spend the night in that tiny, dilapidated, old, smoke-filled shop. Swamiji, with boyish indignation, addressed Swami Shivananda, 'Kalikrishna is a young man, but you, brother, are sufficiently old! With what wisdom did *you* lead me into this plight in the hills?' And turning to Swami Virajananda, he continued, '*Why* did you persuade me to go directly to Mayavati from Kathgodam without allowing me to proceed to Almora?' With a cool head, Swami Virajananda boldly pointed out to Swamiji that it was *his* sympathetic decision to permit the litter carriers 'a smoke and a cup of tea' that had landed them in trouble. Swamiji understood and responded quietly with a few words of fatherly consolation.

On 3 January 1901, the party reached Mayavati. There was no end of joy and inspiration for everyone. To be near him filled the grief-stricken soul of Mrs. Sevier with peace. These were memorable days particularly for the disciples of Swamiji who had the occasion to serve their beloved Guru. We recount briefly a few memorable incidents of this period of Swamiji's stay at Mayavati that centre around Swami Virajananda.

One day Swamiji outlined in detail all the services he desired to have carried on in the Mayavati Ashrama. Listening gravely, Swarupananda willingly accepted responsibility for all the projects, but added that this would be possible only if his assistants would remain for at least three years, helping him whole-heartedly. Without delay Swamiji called all the workers together and asked them if they were agreeable to this. It was Swami Virajananda who maintained that he had a keen desire to lead a life of seclusion devoting his time wholly to austerities and begging his food from door to door. Swamiji dissuaded him saying that it was sufficient if the mind was stilled even for one minute and that it was fruitless to spoil one's health by severe austerities. He argued that some time needs to be spent in the morning and evening in Japa and meditation, and that the rest of the time one ought to engage is scriptural study and work for the good of the world. Said he, 'I want my disciples to feel more inclined towards work than to personal austerities.' Virajananda was, however, unshaken and argued that to gain purity of character and spiritual power, it was absolutely necessary to engage oneself in religious austerities; else, it would not be possible to perform Karma Yoga. Swamiji furiously reproved Virajananda but, after the latter had left, he agreed that what Virajananda had said was actually true. Swamiji himself valued the life of meditation and the freedom of the monk. Recalling his own itinerant days — living on alms and, with the mind fixed on God, having no thought of the world — he declared that they were the happiest and sweetest days of his life, and that he would gladly give anything in exchange for the obscurity that frees one from the cares and worries of public life. Swami Virajananda whole-heartedly accepted Swamiji's command and his life was thus a combination of austerity and spiritual practices following his inner urge, and Karma Yoga following his Guru's mandate.

The Advaita Ashrama was established basing on the central idea that it was dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone. As Swamiji set it forth in the Prospectus: 'Here it is hoped to keep Advaita free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations. Here will be taught and practised nothing but the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple; and though in entire sympathy with all other systems, this Ashrama is dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone.' That 'some brothers still placed a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna in one of the rooms and began their daily worship offering flowers and incense in a simple way' must have come as a surprise and disappointment to Swamiji. Later, on returning to the Belur Math, Swamiji voiced his feelings saying, 'I thought of having one centre at least where the external worship of Sri Ramakrishna would not find a place. But going there [to Mayavati] I found that the Old Man

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[meaning Sri Ramakrishna] had already established himself even there! Well, Well!' At Mayavati however, Swamiji 'vehemently reproached Mother Sevier and Swarupananda, pointing out that in this Ashrama only the Advaita way of life was to be lived, and Puja (ritual worship) was against the regulations'. Yet Swamiji did not say, 'remove everything at once'. Swami Virajananda, who with Swami Vimalananda was an active participant in the worship room, felt ashamed under Swamiji's censure. The worship room was however dismantled on 13 March 1902, a little more than a year after the above incident in January 1901!

It was on 12 January that Swami Virajananda made a large, delicious block of ice-cream with the help of the thick ice that often used to cover the lake in winter. Swamiji relished this favourite preparation of his, though he felt a little unwell towards evening.

It was on another day that the noonday meal was much delayed. Swamiji felt inclined to rebuke Swami Virajananda who was in charge of the cooking. But seeing him 'in the midst of smoke, vigorously blowing the hearth' he did not utter a word and hastily withdrew. He quickly thought of another method for rebuking! When the food was carried to him after a long time, he childishly cried out, 'Take it away! I won't eat.' Virajananda silently stood there, an obedient servant, knowing that Swamiji's mood would pass away. Soon Swamiji began to eat, abruptly his anger melted, and he explained, 'Now I understand why I was angry: I was hungry!'

There was an occasion for a Westerner (Br. Amritananda) to learn to appreciate the Indian ideal of service to the Guru, which though it might seem servile to the Westerner and Swamiji's acceptance of it without remonstrance might arouse awe, was to the Indian spontaneous and one of the sure means by which the disciple progresses in spirituality.

It was on the pen-ultimate day, 17 January, that Swamiji, disgusted because of frequent snowfalls which forced him to remain indoors, was becoming anxious that coolies could not be arranged for his going down to the plains. Swami Virajananda, to relieve Swamiji of his anxiety, said, 'Never mind, Swamiji! In that case, we ourselves will carry you down somehow!' Swamiji converted this into an occasion for merriment. Laughing outright he said, 'Oh, I see! you are scheming to throw me into the *Khud* [canyon]!' However, Swamiji, remembering the adventure on the trip to Mayavati, told Sadananda, 'This time all the arrangements are to be Virajananda's responsibility, since he is cool-headed and not easily distracted. We shall abide by whatever he tells us to do.'

On the way back, at the Deori [also Dehiri] Dak Bungalow, Swami Virajananda again fell into difficulty while cooking rice! Not remembering that rice increases in volume while cooking, he had put into a pot a larger quantity of rice than the vessel could comfortably hold when fully cooked. So, when only half boiled, it repeatedly overflowed the pot, with the result that Swamiji's food was long delayed. To his further consternation, Swamiji arrived on the scene unexpectedly. However, perceiving the situation, Swamiji very kindly said, 'Poor dear! Do this one thing: Put some ghee into the pot and close its mouth. The rice will easily boil and it will be tasty, too.' Hastily Swami Virajananda followed his Guru's mandate, and found that it was true.

As they approached Pilibhit, Swamiji was tempted to tease Swami Virajananda. Getting down from his litter, he called out to Virajananda: 'Come here. I will teach you to ride a horse.' After a few instructions on how to sit and hold the reins, he directed Virajananda to climb on a hired horse, while he himself mounted another. Whipping his own horse to speed, he told Virajananda to do likewise. This, however, was quite unnecessary: watching its equine companion, Virajananda's horse broke into a gallop, while

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Virajananda clung desperately to the horse's shoulder to stay aboard. On all sides there was side-splitting laughter! Amidst all this merriment, Virajananda could hardly realize that this was to be his last meeting with his Master.

The close of the nineteenth century delivered a harsh blow to Swami Virajananda. News reached him at Mayavati that his father, Trailokyanath Basu, had suddenly passed away in Nawada near Gaya. Many fond memories of his father reflecting his many-sided greatness flashed before his mind. He was moved to recall especially that despite his father cherishing great hopes that he could depend on his eldest son Kalikrishna (Virajananda), he had gladly accepted the latter's wish to renounce the world and to devote his life to spiritual practices for the realization of God. The disintegration of the family fortune upon his father's death came to Virajananda as a rude shock, but a Sannyasin he was now and could not but brush away such thoughts as a meaningless dream. On 11 April 1901, Swami Virajananda took two months' leave from the Mayavati Ashrama and set out on a pilgrimage to Kedar-Badri, accompanied by his brother disciple, Brahmachari Jnan Maharaj.

Back at the Mayavati Ashrama, Swami Virajananda once again set his mind on the needs of the Ashrama. With the thought of increasing subscriptions, Swami Virajananda set out towards northern and western parts of India in November 1901. He was bent on preaching and canvassing in many towns in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Sind, Gujarat and Maharashtra. In the course of this undertaking he encountered many persons from many walks of life. In some places he was warmly received and greatly honoured, and in others subjected to rebuke and rebuff: both he accepted with the mental poise of a true Sannyasin. 'Nothing for you here, sir. Seek elsewhere' was one response. At another place he was made to wait for hours and at the end of four hours was told in a condescending tone, 'All right! You may take down my name [as a subscriber to the journal].' One showered on him 'insolent words and threatened him with a shoe!' In more than one place, well-to-do men accorded him lodging only with servants or in an unused stable. In spite of such cold receptions, he was gratified to see that the knowledge of the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda had silently reached people everywhere, even in remote parts of India.

His preaching tour took him to Ahmedabad. There he had taken up his duties with great enthusiasm, when the news of Swamiji's *mahasamadhi*, on 4 July 1902, reached him by telegram. Owing to this distressing news, the whole plan of his mission was disrupted. All the zeal for the work suddenly vanished. Abruptly bringing his activities in Ahmedabad to a close, he returned to Mayavati after an absence of nearly ten months.

An incident of some months past, he learnt on arrival at Mayavati, and this left him tremendously disappointed. He discovered that, while he was engaged in Western India in the interests of *Prabuddha Bharata*, Swami Vivekananda had written to Swami Swarupananda and Mrs. Sevier asking if Virajananda could be spared without seriously affecting the work at Mayavati for his (Swamiji's) personal service. At that time Swamiji's health was critical indeed, and day and night three or four persons had engaged themselves by turns in serving him. On one occasion Swamiji had chided them, 'All of you together are not able to perform properly the work which Kalikrishna could do alone!' But this request from Swamiji was not communicated to Swami Virajananda since by the latter's efforts subscriptions to *Prabuddha Bharata* had been boosted beyond all anticipations. Swami Swarupananda and Mrs. Sevier had written back in reply, 'Should he suddenly come away, giving up that work, the cause of *Prabuddha Bharata* will immensely suffer.'

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Exceedingly tired after many months spent in continuous travel for the sake of the journal, and more so on knowing of the lost opportunity of serving his Guru and being at his bedside during the last days, Swami Virajananda sadly asked Swami Swarupananda to grant him leave for some time. Swami Swarupananda easily understood the condition of his brother disciple and gave his assent. Resorting to a vow of silence, Swami Virajananda resolved to live in a *kutia* (cottage) in the midst of the forest not far distant from the Ashrama and there to perform *tapasya*. To make this possible, Swarupananda arranged for food from the Ashrama to be brought to him there. For nearly fifteen hours each day Virajananda would engage in Japa and meditation. The strenuous discipline did tell on his physique. Extreme weariness overtook him. Swami Turiyananda regretted this state of Virajananda and wrote to him, 'Your zeal is indeed much, but I see that nature is against this. Only after pleasing nature will you triumph over this impediment! There is no gain in forcing, for in that there are more chances of harm than of benefit.' Ayurvedic treatment at Calcutta did not prove to be of any avail. In March 1904 he went to Jayrambati to meet the Holy Mother, his spiritual Guru. The Holy Mother at once diagnosed the ailment and told her beloved disciple on knowing that he meditated at the *Sahasrara*, 'What have you done, my son? That is the final stage — the stage of the Paramahamsa. Is it possible to raise the mind to such a height all of a sudden? At first, after concentrating the mind in the head, the mind should be brought down to the heart and there the Ishta (Chosen Deity) must be meditated upon.' This was a marvellous cure and the benefit Virajananda derived was immense.

The *mahasamadhi* in May 1904 of Swami Niranjanananda, regarding whom Virajananda cherished many memories, was a big blow. For a period, Virajananda assisted Swami Brahmananda, the President of the Order. Who can tell whether or not Virajananda, in playing this role very effectively, felt a partial relief from the dejection he had felt in not being able to serve Swamiji during his last days?

It was the end of the year 1905. From New York Swami Abhedananda and from San Francisco Swami Trigunatitananda were requesting the Math for a monastic helper, and Swami Nirmalananda who had just returned from the West also encouraged Swami Virajananda to go abroad. But in response to Swami Brahmananda's query, Virajananda simply said, 'I cannot lecture'. But he had to yield to the repeated urges from Swami Saradananda, though Providence willed it otherwise there being just one vacant seat in the steamer, which the Math decided would be used by Swami Bodhananda. At Mayavati Swami Swarupananda, who was much delighted at the proposed departure of his brother disciple Virajananda to the West to preach the message of Vedanta, was quite disappointed with the final turn of events and wrote, 'I see that you have rendered my good wishes fruitless!'

Swami Virajananda had however proceeded far on the intended departure to the West; he had even obtained the blessings of the Holy Mother. But now he felt relieved and with tremendous determination plunged into spiritual practices at Kankhal Sevashrama. An unexpected incident, however, made continuation of such austerities by him impossible. A telegram from the Math to him read, 'In Naini Tal, Swarup is seriously ill. He is alone. Immediately one of you must go to attend on him.' Before Swami Virajananda and Brahmachari Jnan could depart, there was a second telegram communicating the demise of Swami Swarupananda, and a letter from Swami Saradananda saying, 'Now, without thinking of anything else, take the next train to Mayavati.' The mandate was clear enough.

Swami Prakashananda had gone to the West a few months before Swami Swarupananda's demise. Swami Vimalananda had left Mayavati to recoup his health. Captain

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Sevier had passed away long before. There was only Mrs. Sevier, and Swami Virajananda could well imagine *her* grief. So, there came a temporary halt to his *tapasya*, and away he went to Mayavati.

As the President of Advaita Ashrama

Mrs. Sevier was naturally quite a bit worried about the future of the Ashrama at Mayavati. She was apprehensive that the work started by Swamiji would come to a halt. She openly told Swami Virajananda on his arrival, 'Why did you come here? *You* cannot cope with the work here! Swarupananda's personality was indeed unique and so was his capacity for work.' Virajananda was neither disappointed nor upset about the remark. His reply revealed the position every worker of the Mission must take: 'Quite true, but the authorities of the Math have sent me. I am a soldier; whether I win or lose, I must fight!' The soldier must obey the mandate and fight without caring for the outcome. Another fearless soldier joined the team: that was Swami Nirbhayananda (Kanai Maharaj, who had been initiated into Sannyasa with Virajananda). Swami Saradananda himself went to Mayavati to make the final administrative arrangements. To Mrs. Sevier he said that the Ashrama would thrive through the will of the Lord, that though one fighter might fall in the battlefield, another would replace him and, taking hold of the flag, would go on fighting. He appointed Swami Virajananda the President of the Ashrama and promised all support to him. He assured him further, 'Have no fear. I shall write articles for you from time to time and help as much as I can.'

Swami Virajananda's nature from boyhood was to be highly economical, and this trait stood him in good stead in tackling the financial difficulties the Advaita Ashrama faced. His sincere devotion, his intense effort and his frugality impressed Mrs. Sevier much, and her confidence and affection for Virajananda grew very rapidly. For the *Prabuddha Bharata*, Sister Nivedita often contributed articles and Swami Virajananda too wrote. Next, Swami Virajananda took up the monumental work initiated by Swami Swarupananda, namely, the publishing of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. His predecessor had brought together a large amount of fine material, and the first volume, comprising Swami Vivekananda's Chicago Addresses, Raja Yoga, and other speeches, was almost ready for publication. Swami Virajananda applied himself zealously to procuring additional material from various sources in India, America and England. To assemble these materials, to edit them, and to present them in a book form required enormous effort. The available notes on Swamiji's classes and lectures sometimes even lacked vital portions, or such vital missing links had been filled in by statements which marred the consistency of Swamiji's statements. In this arduous task Mrs. Sevier came to his help. But the two differed, rooted though were both in their devotion to Swamiji. Mrs. Sevier would sometimes exclaim, 'To bring from Swamiji's mouth *such* English, which people will criticize, is certainly not proper!' Swami Virajananda, on the other hand, endeavoured to maintain the *idea* behind Swamiji's words, even though the language might in some places be not quite elegant.

Besides editing Swamiji's works and publishing them, and attending to the production of *Prabuddha Bharata*, Swami Virajananda was required to supervise several departments of the Ashrama and to maintain an ever watchful eye on the needs of the elderly Mrs. Sevier. As the fifth volume of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* was nearing completion, the idea of bringing out a biography of Swamiji struck Virajananda. When he talked this over with Mrs. Sevier, she was most enthusiastic, and he quickly set about collecting data for the proposed book. Luckily, a qualified writer, an American devotee named Francis (Frank, for short) John Alexander, was then staying in the Ashrama at Mayavati, being immensely fascinated by

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Eastern religion and philosophy, especially by Swamiji and his works. An amazing writer, Frank had the capacity to produce six or seven pages of excellent prose in just an hour sitting at a typewriter. It was soon settled that Virajananda would select the source material, and that later he and Mrs. Sevier would edit the script. Very soon Virajananda found that although Frank's language was quite simple and forceful, yet unavoidable repetitions made his production monotonous and voluminous. Frank's understanding of Indian thought and culture again was not sufficiently deep for the work at hand. As a result, though Virajananda's position was, 'in all sincerity, I do not revise his writing whimsically; I do only out of absolute need,' Frank became annoyed at what appeared to him to be 'merciless surgery upon his manuscript'. Mrs. Sevier had to act as the mediator to bring normalcy even by thrusting some money into Frank's hands so that he, being a liberal-hearted soul, could spend it over the next three or four days! Sometimes it would require Frank's going to Almora for a change and Mrs. Sevier was the supplier of the finance. During Frank's absence, Virajananda explained to Mrs. Sevier his own position in the matter: 'I edit his writing with full discretion. The biography of Swamiji is to be published by the Advaita Ashrama, and the overall responsibility is naturally mine. Should Frank go away, what is there to fear? I myself will write the book. The source material is already here in my hands.' It became soon evident to Virajananda that the biography would run into four volumes, of which Frank had written the first three[1], and Virajananda himself planned to write the fourth. For the first volume Virajananda did not enjoy much freedom for editing, though the rest display his discreet editing. The printing was arranged at Calcutta since the book was of much importance requiring it to be printed well.

In April 1907, Swami Vimalananda, who as we said before had left for the plains to recoup his health, came back to Mayavati as a worker. For a year Vimalananda's health allowed him to assist Swami Virajananda in the functions of the Ashrama, particularly in the editing of the writings of Swamiji. But in February 1908, his old lung disease returned, rendering him weaker and weaker. It was a sad day for Swami Virajananda, 23 July 1908, when in the late hours of the night in his very presence, his boyhood friend and brother monk, Vimalananda, meditating on the Lord, breathed his last. Seeing this, it appeared to Virajananda that death must be a very smooth affair. On the pebble-strewn bank of the mountain stream which gushes beneath the Ashrama, Swami Vimalananda's mortal remains were consigned to flames.

On 28 December 1909, Swami Advaitananda, an elderly monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, entered *Mahasamadhi* at the ripe age of eighty-one. Many unforgettable incidents concerning Swami Advaitananda floated before Swami Virajananda's mind. Numerous expressions of affection he had received from the elderly monk filled Virajananda with inexpressible joy. On 21 August 1911, Swami Ramakrishnananda, another monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, entered *Mahasamadhi*. Several thoughts flashed through Virajananda's mind. It was, it occurred to him repeatedly, Swami Ramakrishnananda who, by offering to teach him mathematics, had taught him renunciation

1. The Mayavati Diary Entry on 3 July 1913 reads: 'Frank signed on a stamped paper his Deed of Release relinquishing all his rights of authorship & copyright on the 3 volumes of Swamiji's Life and hands over the Mss of 3 vols. in favour of Mother in consideration of her having paid him Rs. 2250/- for them. He has to give about 80 pages of Mss which he is doing.' The Entry on 24 July 1913 reads: 'The Deed of Gift by Mother of Swamiji's Life 3 vols to the Ashrama was signed by her in the presence of Mr. Potter & Mr. Murrey as witnesses & handed over to Sw. Virajananda.'

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instead and thereby helped him to join the Baranagore Math. He was sad that he, being at Mayavati then, could not be at the Swami's bedside during the last moments to pay him last homage. The passing away of Devendranath Mazumdar and of Girish Chandra Ghosh too filled Virajananda with an immense shock.

The year 1910 witnessed the ceremony of investiture of novices with Brahmacharya and Sannyasa at Mayavati by Swami Virajananda. It was the ninth of October. One Sri Raghunath came in the morning with a large collection of Bilva leaves from Chira[pani], a place near by. The doctor of Mayavati's dispensary constructed in Swami Virajananda's little room (in the west) a square stone and earthen *Vedi* for the Homa fires to be lit upon. The room was cleaned and preparations for the Brahmacharya and Sannyasa ceremony on the eleventh were made. The 10th was the Saptami Day. After an early bath, the candidates recited Sri Sri Chandi, the Gita, the Upanishads and other stotras. Doctor and Swami Virajanandaji took *Havishyam* (cooked rice with clarified butter) at 4 p.m. under the North-western oak. Songs were sung in the evening. The 11th was the Ashtami Day. The candidates observed the day with fast, study, etc. Vairag, Sitaraman [later Swami Raghavananda], Nirmal [later Swami Madhavananda] and the doctor took the vow of Brahmacharya before the Homa fire from Swami Virajanandaji. The doctor, in addition, went through the Viraja Homa and the remaining portion of the Sannyasa ceremony under Virajanandaji's guidance. The Homa lasted from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. In the first part of the Homa all took part. Swami Virajananda and Br. Tej Narain observed a semi-fast this day. The ceremony was as imposing as it was delightful. On the 12th, at dawn, the doctor, who had been given the Sannyasa name Swami Purnananda, consigned his *danda* (staff) to the river.

The foundation for the Press House (now called the Prabuddha Bharata building) was laid on 22 May 1912 by Mother Sevier, followed by Swami Virajananda, Doctor, Dr. J.C. Bose, Sister Christine, Frank, and others including Mohanlal. A May issue of *Prabuddha Bharata*, the 1st forme of June *Prabuddha Bharata*, a rupee, an anna bit, a pice, and a 25-cent silver coin were placed in a glass bottle into which was further put a big card containing some lines to the effect that the foundation stone is being laid that day by Mother Sevier before all. The bottle was sealed with wax and laid at the South-east corner of the building by Swami Virajananda at about 10:30 a.m. The work of construction went on at a rapid pace. Construction being complete, preparations were made for the performance of Homa on 2 April 1914, on the occasion of entrance into the new Press House. In the evening the Homa was performed, Swami Virajananda acting as *Tantradharak* and Br. Sitapati as the *Vrati*. After Homa, there was arrangement for a sumptuous feast. The Mayavati charitable dispensary too was constructed at this time.

Though Swami Vivekananda had entered *mahasamadhi* on 4 July 1902, yet the work of construction of the memorial temple for Swami Vivekananda at Belur, even in the year 1913, was far from being complete owing to paucity of funds. We learn from the Mayavati Diary Entry of 6 March 1913 that 'Mother [Sevier] sent Rs. 430 by cheque to Swami Brahmananda as contribution collected for Swamiji's Memorial Temple Fund, of which Rs. 188 was from the Ashrama, P.B. Office, Mother and Virajananda.'

In 1913, the second volume of Swamiji's biography came off the press. Virajananda was now immensely tired and his desire to withdraw himself from his labours and to devote his time exclusively to meditation took possession of him once again. Swami Saradananda granted his request for leave on condition that he would retain the responsibility for completing the biography of Swamiji. To this Virajananda readily agreed. Though he was technically relieved of the

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responsibilities of Advaita Ashrama, yet he had to assume the responsibility of the President of the Ashrama, with Swami Prajnananda, his successor, taking advice from him on all matters. He was also to continue as the keeper (Manager) of the Prabuddha Bharata Press. Yet being relieved in a technical sense, Virajananda moved over to the Mother's Bungalow and worked on Swamiji's biography with Sitapati Maharaj assisting him in this undertaking.

It had long been Virajananda's plan, as he had considered leaving Mayavati, to resort to a wandering monk's life — penniless, begging his food, and spending his time in Japa and meditation. But Mrs. Sevier's motherly heart stood in the way. So, he moved over to Shyamala Tal for plunging into a life of *tapasya*, though now and then he came to Mayavati. The work on Swamiji's biography too remained to be completed.

At Shyamala Tal and After

Swami Virajananda had a special interest in gardening, and on several occasions he, while being the President of the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati, sent apples grown in the Ashrama orchard to be sold in the market in Lohaghat, the sub-divisional town nine kilometres downhill. Even when he came to Mayavati from Shyamala Tal, he would take keen interest in the condition of the orchard and the forest, and give directions on the method of cultivation in vivid detail. The Mayavati Diary Entry of 10 July 1918 observes: 'Kali K Maharaj suggests, as our orchard is getting depleted by the old trees dying, to plant in Novr. new grafts to be bought from Supdt. Government Gardens, Jeolikote, Dt. Naini Tal. The holes to be prepared six months ahead.' Further, the Entry of 11 August 1918 mentions a letter from Swami Virajananda detailing the procedure for preparing the manure and the holes in advance, for planting fruit trees as also the rules to be followed regarding leasing.

The third volume of Swamiji's biography came to a close and the matter was sent to press in Calcutta. The galley proofs were conveyed to Virajananda by post. These were corrected with Br. Sitaraman's help and immediately returned to Calcutta. Before the publication of this volume the entire manuscript had been perused with care by Swamis Saradananda and Shuddhananda, both of whom were much pleased. Swami Shuddhananda had, in this connection, written to Swami Virajananda: 'I do not know anyone else who would have been able to bring out such a voluminous biography, labouring untiringly as you have done.' Swami Virajananda had intensely resolved in his heart to bring the fourth and final volume to completion during the year 1918. He mused to himself: 'How strange! Since I have been freed from Mayavati, four years have slipped away — and still I am not free!'

The passing away of Swami Prajnananda in 1918 was no doubt a blow to Virajananda. Swami Saradananda wrote a letter to Virajananda conveying the wish of Swami Brahmananda that he again accept the leadership of Mayavati Ashrama, to which Swami Virajananda responded quickly explaining in detail his problems in completing Swamiji's biography and requesting release from the leadership assignment. The matter was not pursued and Swami Madhavananda was made the fourth President of Advaita Ashrama. At long last the fourth volume of Swamiji's biography came in print and Virajananda undertook a pilgrimage to the South. On 21 March 1919 he came back to Shyamala Tal with his health much improved.

In between spells of meditative life at Shyamala Tal Swami Virajananda had to come to the plains several times and take up responsible assignments for the sake of the Order. But as long as he was at Shyamala Tal, he came to Mayavati from time to time when the demands of some work or the other required him to go to Champavat or Lohaghat.

As the President of the Ramakrishna Order

After accepting on 19 November 1938 to become the sixth President of the Rama-

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krishna Order, Swami Virajananda came to Mayavati once in 1939. That was a memorable occasion. With two attendants the Swami left Shyamala Tal on the afternoon of 2 September. Riding in a litter sent to him from Mayavati, it was the first time he had made the trip to Advaita Ashrama in that fashion. Earlier he had gone either on foot or on horseback, but now owing to old age and declining health neither was suitable. After a night halt in a Dak bungalow at Dehiri, they proceeded to Champavat under the cover of dense, dark clouds. When only nine steep miles had been traversed, a heavy deluge began. Even with umbrellas and waterproof coverings, all were nearly drenched before arriving at Champavat at midday on the 3rd. That day at about 9 a.m., Swami Pavitrananda (then President of the Mayavati Ashrama), Swami Tejasananda (then Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*), Parvati Maharaj, and Swami Paramananda (who was in Belur Math for long, and who had come to be known to Swami Tejasananda at Uttarakashi, vide Mayavati Diary Entry dated 1.9.1939) left Mayavati for Champavat Dak Bungalow to welcome Revered Virajanandaji Maharaj. Jivanand and Motiram had left even earlier to prepare food there for all at Champavat. Swami Virajanandaji and others took food and, after a brief rest, left for Mayavati by 4 p.m. After slow progress the party reached Mayavati by 6.15 p.m.

It had been Virajananda's wish to stay in Mother's Bungalow. In anticipation of his coming, the old house had been cleaned and refurnished, and it pleased him immensely to find it so bright and tidy. His daily routine consisted of several hours of meditation in the morning, and a stroll in the evening along what used to be called 'the Mother's Walk'. Brahmachari Vijnanachaitanya stayed with Swami Virajananda at the Mother's Bungalow, being his *sevak*. Swami Shraddhananda, personal assistant to Virajanandaji, stayed in the Ashrama.

On the evening of the 4th Virajanandaji walked up to the Ashrama, went to the dispensary and then returned to his residence. On the 5th he came to the Ashrama and witnessed the volley-ball game played by the inmates.

On 6th it was the day of Sri Krishna Janmashtami. In the evening all the inmates went to Swami Virajananda's residence with the 'organ' for playing music. There was reading from portions of the *Bhagavatam* and Nivedita's *Cradle Tales of Hinduism*. This was followed by devotional songs. Afterwards the Swami arose and from somewhere brought forth a pretty green glass bottle filled with confections wrapped in gaily decorated papers. To each person he presented one of these festive candies, saying with a smile, 'Just sweeten your mouth!' To someone who asked him, 'Where did you get these from, Maharaj?' he replied with a mischievous chuckle, 'I am Swamiji's Chela (disciple). Therefore, I keep all sorts of things with me!' On the evening of the 7th the gramophone of the Mayavati Hospital was taken to Mother's Bungalow for Swami Virajananda's entertainment.

On the 8th, as per Mayavati Diary Entry, a telegram came from Swami Madhavananda to Swami Virajananda stating that Swami Abhedananda entered *mahasamadhi* at 8 a.m. on 8 September at his Vedanta Centre in Calcutta. The news was rather sudden and unexpected. In the evening some of the inmates went to Virajanandaji Maharaj who spoke for a long time about Swami Abhedananda. On the 9th Swami Virajanandaji sent a wire to Swami Sadrupananda of Vedanta Society, Calcutta, saying that he was shocked to hear of the sudden death of Swami Abhedanandaji. That day being the *ekadashi*, Ramnam Sankirtan was held at Mother's Bungalow in the presence of Virajanandaji. Some songs too were sung. At the end Virajanandaji Maharaj gave to those present 'prasad' in the form of some *kaviraji* tablets (*hajam-goli*, which helps in digestion).

On the 17th, Br. Shyamapada received initiation from Swami Virajanandaji. Gopia

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Mistry, father of Motia Mistry, had earnestly implored him earlier saying, 'I have become old and I deeply desire to do something for my soul. You are now the Guru Maharaj and you have been blessing multitudes of people. Pray, have mercy on this poor ignorant person!' Profoundly touched by the earnestness of this elderly workman, Swami Virajanandaji blessed him with initiation on this day.

On the 19th, 21st, 22nd, and 23rd between 7 and 9 p.m., Swami Virajanandaji narrated to the inmates his reminiscences of Baranagore Math and of Swami Vivekananda. There was left out details regarding 'a particular preparation' which he had cooked for Swami Vivekananda when Swamiji had come to Mayavati. This the Swami narrated on the 24th. A near equivalent of this was prepared by the Manager and Mahavir Maharaj and offered to Swami Virajananda who appreciated it very much. In the evening there was Ramnam Sankirtan in Mother's Bungalow. After the Ramnam, Virajanandaji Maharaj talked for a few minutes.

Since Mayavati's elevation is two thousand feet higher than that of Shyamala Tal, and since Virajanandaji too was advanced in years with a weak heart detected as early as in April 1935, Virajanandaji had at times considerable trouble in breathing. Although he had planned to remain for at least a month in Mayavati, he decided to leave for Shyamala Tal, staying at Mayavati for twenty-four days only. Arrangement for the litter bearers was made on the 25th, and on 26th Swami Virajanandaji, Swami Shraddhananda and Br. Vijnanachaitanya took their meal at about 7 a.m. and left Mayavati by 8.30 a.m. All the inmates accompanied him up to Dharamgarh.

As is the tradition at Mayavati, there are no memorials erected in memory of Virajanandaji Maharaj. However, everything in the air, as the above narrative shows, is vibrant with many lofty memories of this great disciple of Swamiji. ❐

Swami Virajananda at Mayavati

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A Brief Life-Sketch of Some of the Presidents of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati

SWAMI SATYAPRIYANANDA

Among the fifteen Presidents of the Ashrama, we are happy to say that we have with us during the centenary year of the Ashrama, Swamis Vandanananandaji (eleventh), Ananyanandaji (thirteenth) and Mumukshanandaji, the present and fifteenth President. We present in this issue a short life-sketch of those twelve Presidents who are not with us in their mortal frames at the time of our going to the Press. However, we are sure that their concern for the growth of the Ashrama on its foundational principles and their good wishes for the inmates, friends, well-wishers, admirers, patrons and visitors, which they exhibited during their leadership role is still with us as our asset. Among the pioneers we must make a special mention of the Seviers and of Swami Swarupananda, the Founder-President. This we have done in separate articles especially devoted to them, though their repeated mention of necessity finds a place in the report and in many of the articles which appear in this issue. In the present article we include the life-sketch of the remaining eleven of the twelve Presidents which includes Swamis Virajananda (second), Madhavananda (fourth), Vireswarananda (fifth) and Gambhirananda (eighth), who all rose to adorn the position of the President of the Ramakrishna Order.

Second President: Swami Virajananda

Swami Virajananda, known as Kalikrishna Basu in his pre-monastic life, was born of a respectable Kayastha family of Calcutta, on 10 June 1873, the holy Snan Purnima day. His father, Sri Trailokyanath Basu, was a well-established physician of Calcutta. Kalikrishna had his education first at the Training Academy and later at the Ripon College where Sri Mahendranath Gupta or M., the recorder of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was a professor.

Even at the early age, Kalikrishna evinced a keen interest in spiritual matters and he used to spend much of his time in the study of scriptures and in singing Bhajan and Kirtan in the company of young boys of similar spiritual disposition. This spiritual inclination led him to Sri Ramachandra Datta, a house-holder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, from whom he used to hear about the wonderful life of Sri Ramakrishna. It was Mahendranath Gupta, however, who discerned his aspirations and directed him to the Sannyasin disciples of the Master who were then living in the newly started Baranagore Math in Calcutta.

This was a turning point in the life of Kalikrishna. The austerity, the spiritual atmosphere, especially that of Swami Ramakrishnananda, left an abiding impression on the mind of young Kalikrishna, who used to visit the monastery often and even on occasions spend a few days there. As days passed by, the attraction for the life of a monk grew in intensity until in 1891 at the age of 17, Kalikrishna renounced the world and joined the brotherhood at Baranagore. In taking this step, he was fortunate enough to obtain the sincere blessings of his parents. At that time Swami Vivekananda was wandering as a Parivrajaka, and Kalikrishna came into contact with him only after his return from the West in 1897. Indeed those days at Baranagore monastery were full of inspiration to Kalikrishna, for here the young disciples of the Master, developed, in a great measure, their strength, and holiness. The hard life of Tapasya could not deter him the least and he threw himself heart and soul into the work

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in the monastery. He got the unique privilege of serving the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who lovingly moulded his spiritual life. The other companions with whom he used to visit the Baranagore Math also joined the Order one by one and later became known to the world as Swamis Vimalananda, Shuddhananda, Prakashananda, Bodhananda, Atmananda and Nirbhayananda. After being blessed with initiation by the Holy Mother in 1892, Kalikrishna spent some time in spiritual practices in the company of Swami Premananda at Vrindaban.

Swami Vivekananda, after his return from the West in 1897, initiated Kalikrishna into the monastic life in that very year under the name of Swami Virajananda. Shortly after, under Swami Vivekananda's special instructions, he went to Dacca and a few other places in East Bengal for preaching work and organized with success famine relief work at Deoghar. Swami Virajananda also had the privilege of rendering personal service to Swami Vivekananda, who, in turn, was specially pleased with his one-pointed devotion and service.

In the middle of 1890, Swami Vivekananda started on his second visit to the West. Under Swami's instruction, Swami Virajananda went as a worker to the newly started Advaita Ashrama in the heart of the Himalayas at Mayavati. Then the Ashrama was in its beginning and his help was invaluable to the Seviers in organizing it. In the meanwhile the Ashrama had to suffer a great loss due to the passing away of Captain J.H. Sevier, one of the most beloved western disciples of Swami Vivekananda, on the 28 October 1900. Shortly after his return from the second visit to America, Swami Vivekananda wanted to pay a special visit to Mayavati to comfort Mrs. Sevier in her bereavement. It was winter and the road to Mayavati was nearly impassable, the difficulties being all the more due to want of proper facilities for travel. The journey from the railway station to Mayavati — a distance of sixty-five miles — was by no means pleasant. The task of bringing Swamiji safely to Mayavati from Kathgodam along with the whole party fell on Swami Virajananda. Undaunted by the severe winter, the Swami started from Mayavati, covered the distance only in two days, walking day and night, and was ready at Kathgodam in time to arrange for escorting the party. Swami Vivekananda was highly pleased at this and remarked, 'He is indeed a fit disciple of mine!' Swamiji stayed at Mayavati from 3rd to 18th January 1901, and this period was indeed memorable for Swami Virajananda and his brother disciples at Mayavati. Again, Swami Virajananda escorted Swami Vivekananda on his way back as far as Pilibhit and alas, this was to be their last meeting. Swami Virajananda was at Allahabad on a tour when Swami Vivekananda entered *Mahasamadhi* at the Belur Math on 4 July 1902.

A deep grief at not having been able to be present beside Swamiji in his last days filled Swami Virajananda whose devotion to his Guru was intense. He therefore retired from active life to spend three years in study and meditation, and in serving Swamis Brahmananda and Turiyananda. In 1904 there was a proposal to send him to America, but it fell through as the Swami preferred to remain in India and practise Tapasya.

After the passing away of Swami Swarupananda in 1906, Swami Virajananda was appointed President in his stead, and given the onerous task of building up the institution. For eight years he continued to bear the burden responsibility. This can be considered one of the most creative periods of his life.

His work at Mayavati was many-sided. (We have presented the details of his life at Mayavati in a separate article.) In addition to being the Editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, the Organ of the Ramakrishna Order, he edited the monumental life of Swami Vivekananda by his Eastern and Western disciples in four volumes. The collection, edition and publication of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* are also permanent tributes to his en-

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ergy and intellectual abilities.

Swami Virajananda gave up the presidentship of the Advaita Ashrama on 15 December 1913, but continued to stay there for one more year to complete the edition of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. Sorely in need of a peace retreat where he could spend his days alone, the Swami started a new Ashrama at Shayamala Tal in the Himalayas in the year 1915. He spent ten years in this retreat, in solitude, study, and long hours of meditation. His life at Shyamala Tal was an example of the simplest living, of sever self-discipline and austerity. He had a special affection for the Ashrama, as Swami Virajananda was touched by the great need of medical help to the needy and illiterate people of the villages around his retreat. Indeed from 1926 onwards, his desire for service of Man grew and he took an increasingly keen interest in the activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. In 1934 he was elected the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission; from now on he entered into a period of intense activity. In May 1938, he became the Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and at the end of the year, on the demise of Swami Shuddhananda, he became the President.

Swami Virajananda's period of presidentship witnessed a phenomenal expansion of the Ramakrishna Mission in extent and activity. The spiritual influence he radiated, his serene temperament, along with the joyful simplicity of a child, attracted to him thousands of devotees, young and old, men and women, and he moulded the lives of the many young men who joined the Ramakrishna Order. More than once the Swami went on extensive tours to different parts of India, and thousands of men and women had their spiritual life awakened and strengthened through his advice and personal influence. Indeed we find in the Swami a wonderful example of the ideal of Swami Vivekananda — intense activity coupled with intense meditation.

His advice to disciples, a valuable spiritual legacy, has been published under the title *Paramartha Prasanga* in Bengali. This book was translated into English and Hindi and published in India. An American edition of the same in English, entitled *Towards the Goal Supreme*, was published in 1950.

At 6.56 a.m. on the morning of 30 May 1950, the Swami entered *Mahasamadhi* after a brief illness. In his passing away, the devotees lost an invaluable guide and the world a great spiritual personality.

Third President: Swami Prajnananda

A life of great promise and ripe usefulness such as that of **Swami Prajnananda** was cut off at the early age of 39. He was a dedicated patriot, known in his pre-monastic days as Devabrata Basu. In the early Indian National Movement he had been a prominent worker and, together with Aurobindo Ghosh, had been imprisoned in connection with the Alipore Bomb case. Tall and of dignified bearing, he possessed a serene disposition and a deeply reflective and creative mind. A high-souled idealist, his life had always been of high ideals and purposes and latterly in the lives and ideals of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna, he found the Heroes whom he had been seeking and came ultimately to surrender himself whole-heartedly to their Cause. His acceptance of them tinged his whole being and changed his whole outlook on life; many times he bore testimony to his great desire to serve the Cause and although crippled in his endeavours by a failing health, it was always his one desire to be 'a humble worker in the vineyard of Swamiji'. He never failed to express the utmost kindliness and geniality of spirit to those who came in contact with him. To those who leaned on him in the hour of trouble and distress, he always brought infinite tenderness and protection. He came to Advaita Ashrama in December 1913, and subsequently became the President of the Advaita Ashrama (see Mayavati Diary Entry of 30 March 1916). He fulfilled the different relations which the office of the Presi-

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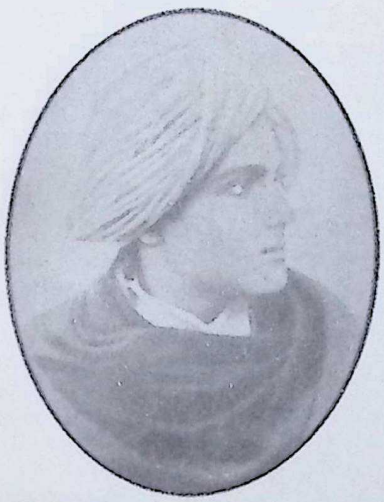
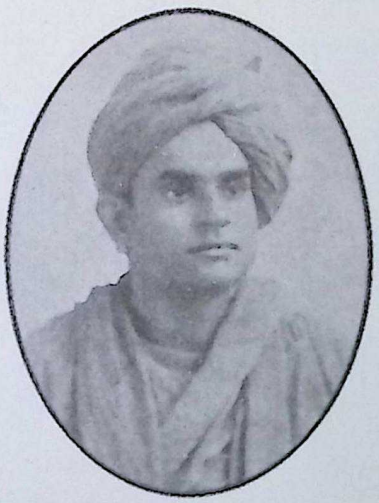
"...But on the heights of the Himalayas I have a place where I am determined nothing shall enter except pure truth. There I want to work out this idea.... There are an Englishman and an Englishwoman in charge of the place. The purpose is to train seekers of truth and to bring up children without fear and without superstition. They shall not hear about Christs and Buddhas and Shivas and Vishnus—none of these. They shall learn, from the start, to stand upon their own feet. They shall learn from their childhood that God is the spirit and should be worshipped in spirit and in truth...."

—Swami Vivekananda

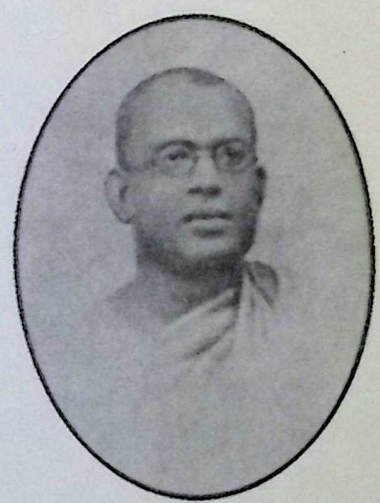
PAST PRESIDENTS OF ADVAITA ASHRAMA, MAYAVATI



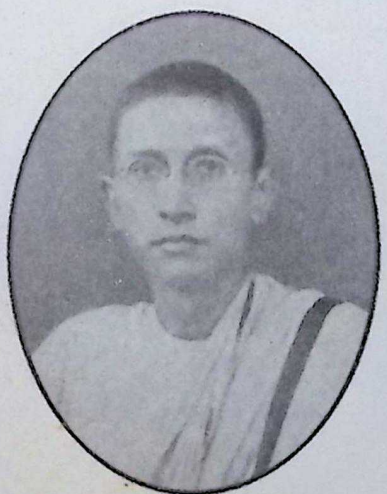
Swami Swarupananda (1899–1906)



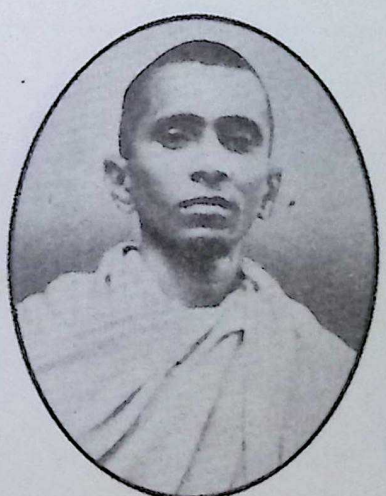
Swami Virajananda (1906–1913)



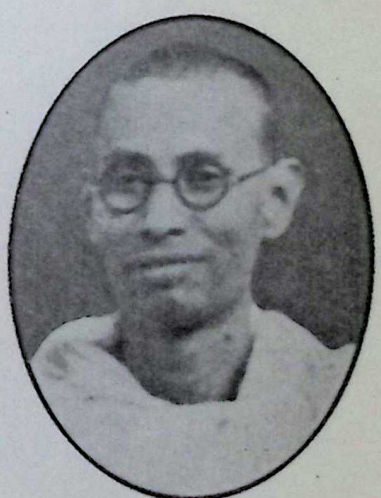
Swami Prajnananda (1914–1918)



Swami Madhavananda (1918–1927)



Swami Vireshwarananda (1927–1937)



Swami Pavitrananda (1937–1947)

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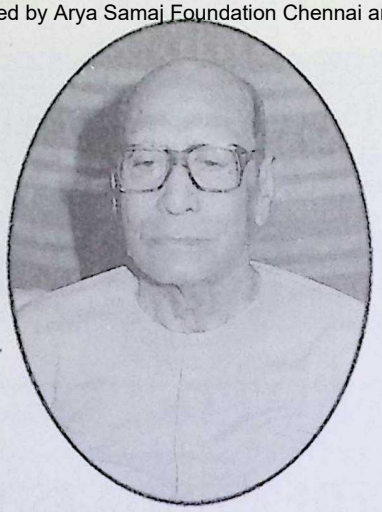
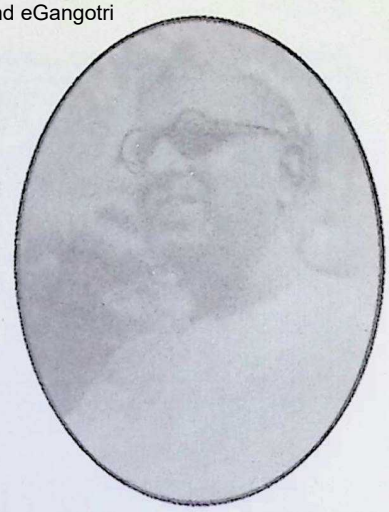
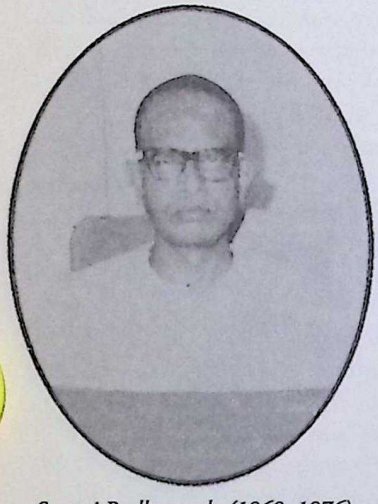
Swami Yogeshwarananda (1948–1953)



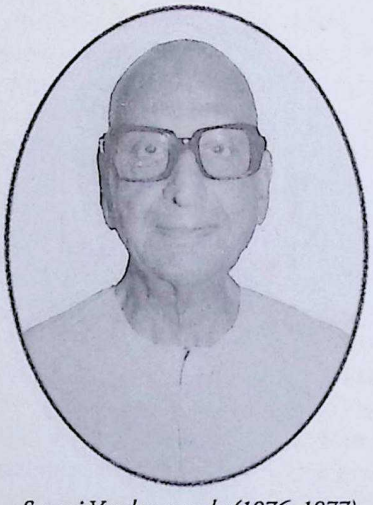
Swami Gambhirananda (1953–1963)



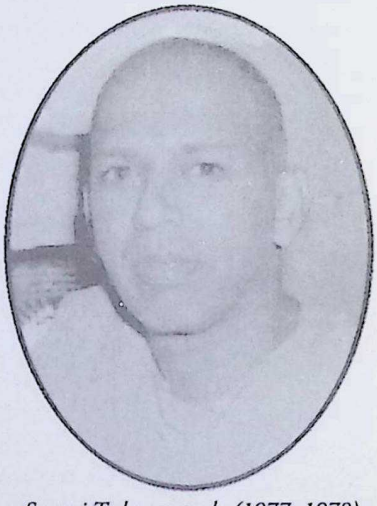
Swami Chidatmananda (1964–1968)



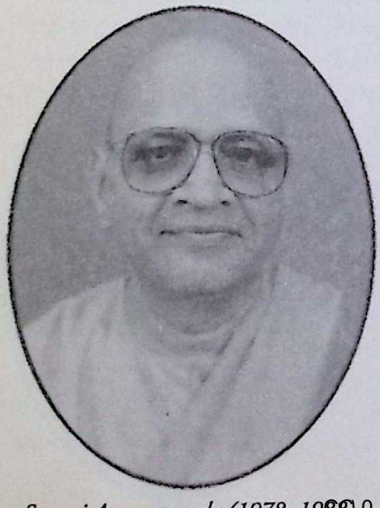
Swami Budhananda (1969–1976)



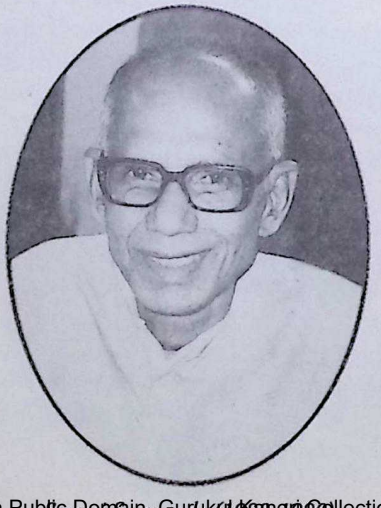
Swami Vandanananda (1976–1977)



Swami Tadrupananda (1977–1978)



Swami Anantyananda (1978–1988)



Swami Sukhanda (1988–1990)

Swami Mumukshananda (1991–

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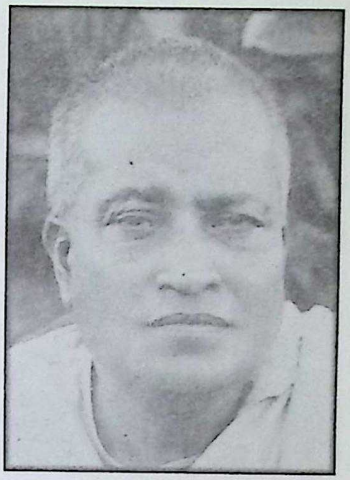
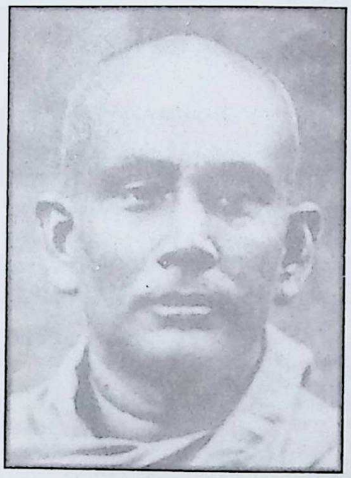
DIRECT DISCIPLES WHO VISITED MAYAVATI

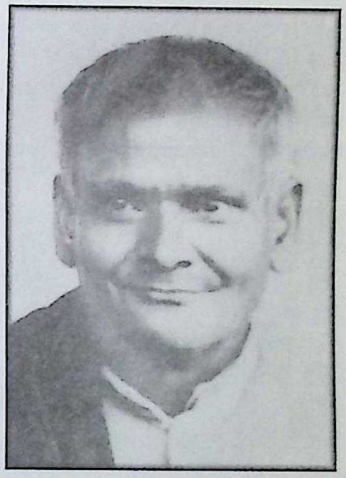
Swami Saradananda



Swami Shivananda



Swami Turiyananda



Swami Subodhananda

THE PIONEERS

Mrs. J. H. Sevier

Capt. J. H. Sevier

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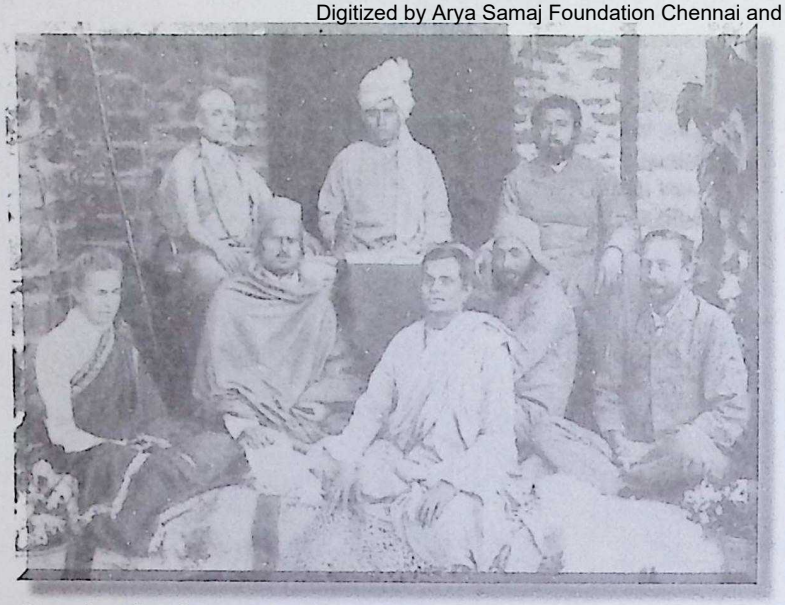
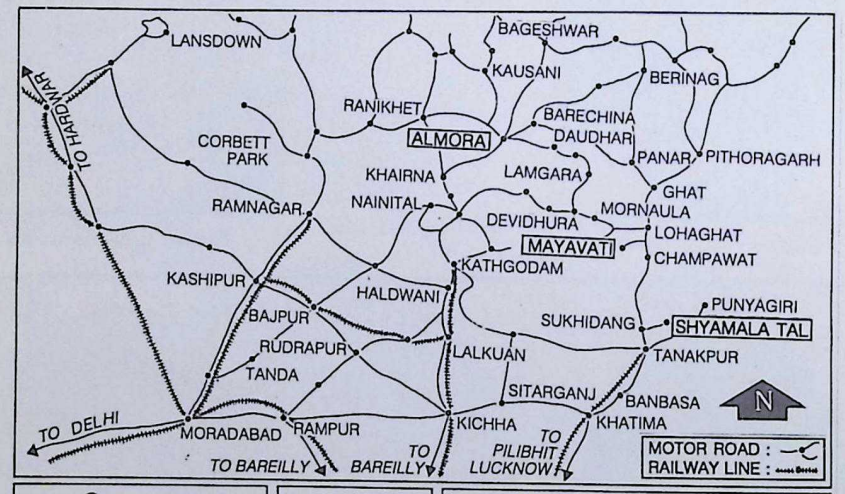
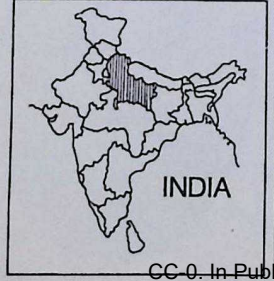
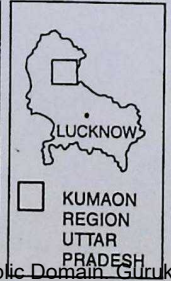


Some disciples of Swami Vivekananda at Mayavati
Top row (left to right)
Swami Prakashananda, Swami Swarupananda and Swami Sacchidananda
Bottom row (left to right)
Mrs. Sevier, Swami Nirbhayananda, Swami Virajananda, Swami Vimalananda, and Brahmachari Amritananda







ROUTE TO MAYAVATI, SHYAMALA TAL AND ALMORA

TANAKPUR	—	SUKHIDANG	23 km
SUKHIDANG	—	SHYAMALA TAL	5 km
TANAKPUR	—	LOHAGHAT	88 km
LOHAGHAT	—	MAYAVATI	9 km
LOHAGHAT	—	PITHORAGARH	62 km
LOHAGHAT	—	ALMORA	122 km
KATHGODAM	—	NAINITAL	34 km
NAINITAL	—	ALMORA	60 km

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dent required with a calmness and equanimity of temper which was unruffled even in difficulty. His relations with his co-workers were very sweet and pleasant, his behaviour towards them was as could be desired, and the latter found in him a friend and guide in one.

Possessed of great intellectual acumen, he had a strong grasp of the problems of the day as he understood them, and his intellectual discourses on the Vedanta Philosophy, of which he was an ardent student, were very luminous and fascinating. He edited the Bengali monthly *Udbodhan* for some period, when he wrote in its pages a series of illuminating articles on the Indian problems styled 'Bharater Sadhana'. He conducted the *Prabuddha Bharata* for a period of over four years at a high standard and most of the highly intellectual articles which appeared in its pages proceeded from his masterly pen. The Mayavati Diary Entry dated 11 September 1913 mentions a letter from Sri Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) 'praising him for the nice articles he has been writing in the paper'. 'Baburam Maharaj sends a letter to Prajnananda Maharaj giving many instructions and advice and asking all to cooperate with each other & show to the world what Swamiji was by our conduct, character & noble lives; it is far good, he says, to lead an exemplary life than to preach the high ideals' reads the Diary Entry of 9 October 1914. Swami Prajnananda's life showed that he followed this advice to the letter. At the Homa ceremony held on 4 December 1914 (see Diary) in connection with the opening of the Mayavati Charitable Dispensary, the Swami played the part of the *pujak* (worshipper).

To those who sought, he was always willing to help spiritually as much as in him lay. The one triumphant spiritual mood in him was abounding love and unflinching faith in Sri Ramakrishna, a love and faith which deepened with years. He went to Calcutta for the treatment of his illness leaving Mayavati on 17 February 1918, and passed away on 20 April 1918 due to heart-failure.

Fourth President: Swami Madhavananda

Swami Madhavananda, known as Nirmal Basu in his pre-monastic life, was born on 15 December 1888 in Baganchra, a village about four miles from Santipur in the district of Nadia, West Bengal. After graduating from the Calcutta University, he joined the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in January 1910. He was an initiated disciple of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, and was ordained *Sannyasin* by Swami Brahmananda in 1916. He came into intimate contact with the other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna also, and worked in various capacities in the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. He was for some time at the Udbodhan, helping in the editing work of *Udbodhan*, the Bengali monthly of the Ramakrishna Order. He came to the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, in 1917, became one of its Trustees in 1918, and its President from 1918 to 1827. He was also the President of the Publication Department at Calcutta which came into existence in 1920 during his regime.

In March 1922, he was elected a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the Governing Body of the Mission. In 1927, he was sent to San Francisco, U.S.A., as the Head of the Vedanta Center there. He was recalled to India in 1929 to become the Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, with its headquarters at Belur, near Calcutta. In May 1938, he was appointed the General Secretary of the Math and Mission, which post he held with distinction till April 1961, with only a gap of two years between 1949 and 1951, when he lived in retirement for reasons of health. In March 1962, he was nominated Vice-President of the Organization, and became its President on 4 August 1962, which position he occupied till the last.

Swami Madhavananda was noted for his saintliness, austerity, straightforwardness, simplicity, devotion to duty, and firm adherence to high ideals and moral principles, and was meticulous in all matters. Patient and forbearing under all conditions, he

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showed a marked tolerance for the failings of his juniors. Endowed as he was with remarkable qualities of head and heart, he commanded the spontaneous respect and implicit obedience of one and all in the Organization. Under his wise stewardship and guidance, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission has grown and expanded immeasurably in all directions.

The Swami was an erudite scholar with an intimate grasp of the Hindu scriptures. He edited and translated many valuable books of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature such as the *Cultural Heritage of India* (the first three volumes), *The Great Women of India* (Holy Mother Centenary Volume), *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (published by the Madras Math), the *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission*. His translations into English of many of the Sanskrit scriptures is very lucid, faithful and authoritative: *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, Vedānta Paribhāṣā, Bhāṣā Paricheda, Mimāṁsā Paribhāṣā, Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, The Last Message of Sri Krishna. Of these, his translation of *Śrī Śaṅkara's* commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is a monumental work. It will not be too much to say that no publication of the Mission in English, Bengali, Sanskrit or Hindi was brought out without either being edited by or passed through him.

Swami Madhavanandaji's life at Mayavati as a monastic worker, President and as a visiting monk are each memorable. Before his first going to Mayavati as a monastic worker, he had an occasion to meet the Holy Mother, his *guru*, who 'graciously observed that Sri Ramakrishna is all. It is not easy for everybody to undergo spiritual discipline. One has got to do it with a cool head. The work of the Order is true service to Him.' This message from the Holy Mother was reflected in every work performed by Swami Madhavananda during his entire life. In the Himalayan solitude, Nirmal Maharaj and a few others were initiated into *Brahmacharya* by Swami Virajananda. Most of the next year was spent in *tapasya* in Haridwar and Rishikesh. For two years from 1913 he stayed at the Udbodhan House and assisted Swami Shuddhananda who was the editor of *Udbodhan*. In 1916, as we said before, he was ordained into *Sannyasa* by Swami Brahmananda.

Swami Madhavananda was again sent to Mayavati as a monastic worker in 1917. Later, in April 1918, consequent on the demise of Swami Prajnananda, he was appointed President of the Advaita Ashrama. The period of his Presidentship can be considered the golden era for Mayavati. Swami Madhavananda as the energetic President of the Ashrama and other members of the Advaita Ashrama cooperated 'in harmony and peace for making it [the Ashrama] an efficient and fit instrument for bringing relief and comfort to the Paharis and spreading enlightenment among them'. He lifted to a very high plane the role of the Ashrama in spreading the ideology and philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda by his management of *Prabuddha Bharata*. He wrote for the *Prabuddha Bharata* as well as published and conducted, with the blessings of Swamis Brahmananda and Shivananda, *Samanvaya*, a monthly magazine in Hindi, in collaboration with the late Pandit Suryakanta Tripathi (Nirala), the well-known Hindi poet. Swami Madhavanandaji campaigned vigorously canvassed for *Samanvaya* as a result of which it gained wide popularity, the Maharaja of Alwar himself subscribing for 350 copies. Swami Madhavananda took this opportunity of his association with Nirala to translate into Hindi many works of Swami Vivekananda and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, again with the active co-operation of Sri Nirala. His books, *Hindi Grammar at a Glance* and *Bengali Grammar at a Glance* are indicative of the versatile intellect of Swami Madhavananda.

With Revered Swami Vireswaranandaji, Swami Madhavananda revised the index of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. Due

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to his initiative, Advaita Ashrama acquired the copy-right in respect of the Swamiji's *Inspired Talks* from Madras Math.

While at Mayavati, he had also toured other parts of the country extensively. Particular mention should be made of his tour of Gujarat and his notable contribution to the establishment of the Ramakrishna Ashrama at Rajkot.

Swami Madhavananda's ten years stay in Mayavati was an example to the other monks of the Mission. His personal comfort was always a matter of unconcern to him. Indeed, physical pains or illness he would suffer quietly. *Titiksha*, referred to in the *Shastras*, was a part of his mental make-up. While in Mayavati, he had suffered from acute attacks of eczema. He could not sleep at night. Although a part of his body would be on the bed, he had to keep his legs on wooden boxes pieced together. Strangely enough, none heard any complaint from him. Even in such a condition, his daily prayer and worship, japa, study of the *Shastras* and religious discussions were never interrupted. At that time the monks had to do themselves many jobs of the Ashrama. The journal *Prabuddha Bharata* used to be printed in the press of the Mayavati Ashrama. Most of the work relating to binding the printed forms, applying gum, sewing, etc. — normally the work of daftries — was also done by Swami Madhavananda, the President, along with other workers. At that time, the magazine used to be mailed at Champavat [2½ hours by forest route infested with tigers!] in instalments over a week. Swami Madhavanandaji, realizing the difficulty, pursued doggedly the matter of having a sub-post office at the Ashrama itself. His attempts succeeded on 1 April 1919 when an 'experimental post office was opened at Mayavati ... for a period of six months'. After that period, it became a regular post office getting its own seal on 4 November 1919. He used to enjoy cooking food for the inmates, if the cook was absent. Quietly without telling anybody, he would even do happily the work of a sweeper, if he was absent! This innate austerity, this spirit of service, continued to be the predominant trait of Swami Madhavananda's character even when he had attained the highest position of the President of the Order.

Swami Madhavananda's visit to Mayavati in 1955 was another memorable occasion. Even when he was President, prolonged discussions on religious matters used to be held under his supervision. Memories of this were brought back during this visit. He participated in discussions, on self-effort versus grace, for instance. On one occasion, he delivered an inspiring speech on God's grace. He used to discuss many problems of monastic life with his monastic brothers, and stressed 'the necessity of self-control and concentration as the main key to open the gate of realization'. He also held classes in Hindi every morning which everybody attended. The inmates at this time felt happy to remember those never-to-be forgotten days with Nirmal Maharaj and gave expression to their reactions in the following words: 'The sweet and cordial relation which we all had with our beloved Nirmal Maharaj are now intensely felt by us. The vacuum [on his leaving Mayavati on 31 May 1955] will never be filled. Let the grace of Sri Thakur spare his exalted life for many more years to come!!'

One who wrote about him brought out the Swami's attitude towards work: 'To work with Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj was to realize unmistakably that work is only a different form of worship, and that every care, thoroughness and sense of service to the Lord must be therefore bestowed on it wholeheartedly. It was a noted characteristic of the Swami not to waste a single minute of the waking state but to make use of it profitably. He was full with the golden motto: "Waste not, and want not," and his acts whispered, as it were, that sagacious counsel' (*Vedanta Kesari*, 1968, p. 192).

An undercurrent of God-thought seemed to run in Madhavanandaji even when

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he was busily engaged. Pointing out the window he said once, 'Just see how that felxible branch-end dances about to the tune of the breeze, now to the right, now to the left, now still for a few moments, now again backwards, soon after to the front once more, and so on, entirely as the breeze wants it to do with the result that it is not damaged in spite of the strong gale or tempest, and does not get broken, but remains whole. Similarly, if only we could attune ourselves to the will of God at all times....' On another occasion he held that a suitcase emptied of its contents was not really empty: 'Why, God *is* there!' he would observe. (*Vedanta Kesari*, 1969, pp. 193–4)

As the executive head of the vast Organization, and later as its spiritual leader, he travelled far and wide in India and abroad. He visited the U.S.A. thrice, once when he was sent as the Head of the Vedanta Center at San Francisco (1927–1929), a second time in 1956 for the dedication of Sri Ramakrishna Temple at Santa Barbara, California, and a third time in 1961 for reasons of health. During the first two visits, particularly the second one, he visited most of the Ramakrishna Mission centres in U.S.A. as also the centres in London and Gretz (near Paris in France). During these visits in India and abroad, he instructed his subordinates, inspected their work, and inspired and guided them towards a better life. As the spiritual head of the Organization, he had initiated a large number of lay devotees.

On 6 October 1965, at 6.50 p.m. he entered *Mahasamadhi* at the Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta, where the Swami, ailing for a long time, had been hospitalized a month earlier. To the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, the loss is irreparable, and his disciples have been deprived of a loving spiritual guide. His demise removed from our midst a great personality, noted for his deep scholarship, selfless service, and sterling spiritual qualities.

Fifth President: Swami Vireswarananda

Swami Vireswarananda, known in his pre-monastic life as Panduranga Prabhu, hailed from Gurupur, South Kanara (Karnataka), and was born in Madras on 31 October 1892. He joined the Ramakrishna Order at its Madras Centre in the year 1916, after graduation from the Presidency College, Madras. He had the good fortune of being initiated by Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, at her native village, Jayrambati. He had his Sannyasa in 1920 from Swami Brahmananda. He had also the rare privilege of coming into intimate contact with most of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, thus enabling him to absorb the authentic traditions of the Order, handed down through these direct disciples.

The Swami has an outstanding record of service to the Organization. After serving assiduously for some years at the Ramakrishna Math, Madras, he became, sometime in 1921, a member of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, the home of *Prabuddha Bharata* in the Himalayas, and, later on, the Manager of its Calcutta Branch, a major publication centre of the Organization. Under his able direction during this period, there was a considerable growth in the dissemination of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature by the Advaita Ashrama. In 1927 he became one of the Trustees of the Advaita Ashrama. In the same year, on April 14, he was appointed President of the Advaita Ashrama, which position he held until 1937.

During his presidentship, the work of the Advaita Ashrama saw considerable expansion and consolidation. The credit of bringing out the attractive and rich special issue of the *Prabuddha Bharata* in 1936, the Birth Centenary Year of Sri Ramakrishna, goes mainly to Swami Vireswaranandaji. His fine aesthetic sense and artistic taste in the matter of publication of books and journals combined with his mature practical wisdom imparted a new dimension and vigour to the activities of the Advaita Ashrama. Long before he assumed charge as President, there had been a free dispensary at Mayavati. Due to his sincere earnestness and tireless efforts, an indoor section with 12 beds was also

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added in a new building, along with an operation theatre. For this work he had secured a liberal financial assistance of Rs. 1,10,000 [an enormous amount in 1937] from the then ruler of Morvi State in Gujarat. That assistance reached the Ashrama on 16 October 1937 by when Swami Vireswarananda had freed himself from the responsibilities of the Ashrama to engage himself in *tapasya*. Swami Vireswaranandaji, self-effacing as he was, sent a wire from Kankhal congratulating Bhupen Maharaj for the Morvi donation on coming to know of its receipt.

Swami Vireswaranandaji was an all-rounder and his work as President of Mayavati Ashrama also amply reflects this. With Swami Madhavananda he revised the index of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. He remembered Christmas as an occasion to send a parcel of shirts for the servants of Mayavati. He was quite fond of cooking, especially new and delicious dishes, which the inmates greatly relished. He was keenly interested in play. He sent shuttlecocks remembering that his colleagues played Badminton at Mayavati. He brought a ludo board to Mayavati for the inmates to play and relax. He went on lecture tours and utilized every opportunity to spread the message of the Holy Trio and for campaigning for the journals (*Prabuddha Bharata* and *Samanvaya*).

It was on 18 August 1928 that amidst scenic beauty the inmates created a paradise on earth by holding a Flower Show at Mayavati. Decoration continued from early morning till 2 p.m. when the show-room was opened by Swami Atmabodhananda. The programme consisted of instrumental music, going round the exhibition hall, songs and speeches, indoor game (ludo; an album 'Our Dear Old London' was awarded by Swami Vireswarananda to the winner at the instance of Swami Atmabodhananda, the President of the day's function) and refreshment. Some 88 varieties of flowers, wild and domestic, were collected and no less than 20 varieties of ferns, moss and wild blossoms were gathered from every creek and corner of Mayavati. Swami Ishananda went as far as Forti to bring flowers!

There was also much intellectual activity, both individual and involving the inmates! 'It is proposed that we shall meet in the Drawing room every night after supper and practise lecturing.... It is settled that extempore and prepared speeches should be tried alternately.' The intention was actualized with a series of lectures on a variety of topics in which initially some, and later many, participated with great enthusiasm. Then there was the theological Competitive Examination on 19 September 1930 on Lectures from Colombo to Almora and the *Bhagavad Gita* with prizes for getting at least 50 per cent marks, and each examinee was required to give a lecture on 'Religion in Indian Life'! The daily readings too were on a spectrum of topics: Religion, Philosophy, *Puranas*, Science, Sociology, History, etc.

In 1929 he was elected a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission. In 1938 he became one of the Assistant Secretaries of the Organization and looked after its various activities. He was in charge of the relief operation during the Bengal famine of 1943–1945, and also supervised other relief and rehabilitation programmes of the Organization over a long period. Between 1949 and 1951, when Swami Madhavananda, the then General Secretary, took leave on health grounds, Swami Vireswarananda assumed this office, which he held again from 1961 till he was elected the Tenth President of the Organization on 16 February 1966, in which capacity he served the Order till his last day.

During his stewardship, the Organization as a whole saw much expansion and consolidation. He was deeply interested in the rural development work of the Organization and showed a keen concern for the all-round development of the weaker sections of society. Till the end he was counselling and

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guiding such activities.

An erudite scholar with an intimate understanding of the scriptures, the Swami has to his credit many publications. His abridged translations of the commentaries of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja on the *Brahma-Sūtras* have the stamp of scholarship. Other books by him are: an English translation of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* with Śrīdhara's gloss, *Spiritual Ideals for the Modern Age, Our Duty Towards the Motherland, The Holy Mother — Ideal of Womanhood,* and *Paths to God-realization.*

The Swami, who was ailing for some days, entered *Mahasamadhi* on 13 March 1985 at 3.17 p.m. at Belur Math. In his passing away, the Ramakrishna Order has sustained an irreparable loss, because he symbolizes an eventful career of dedication and service to the Organization and the country at large. He left behind thousands of disciples throughout India and abroad.

Sixth President: Swami Pavitrananda

Swami Pavitrananda, an initiated disciple of Swami Brahmananda, joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1922 at the age of twenty-six, and in the very next year was initiated into monastic vows by Swami Shivananda, second President of the Ramakrishna Order. He had a Master's degree in English literature. For a short time after Sannyasa, he was deputed to conduct religious classes at Annamalai University in the Madras Presidency. In April 1925, the Swami was posted to Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. He was closely and continuously associated with it, and with its Publication Department in Calcutta, for nearly twenty-four years, until 1948.

Familiarly known as Bhupen Maharaj, the Swami worked for some years as Manager of the Advaita Ashrama Publication Department. Then he became the Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* for four years from 1931. In 1937 he was elected President of the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati, which position he retained till 1948. As President of Advaita Ashrama he worked hard to expand the activities of the Publication Department and brought out several new books and compilations. In spite of the post-World War publishing difficulties, he was successful in bringing out the sumptuous Golden Jubilee Number of *Prabuddha Bharata* in 1945. During his period, there were classes and talks given by visiting guests on various subjects. The Swami was elected a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1947. Two years later he was appointed one of the Assistant Secretaries at Headquarters.

In 1951 Swami Pavitrananda was sent over to the U.S.A. as Head of the Vedanta Society of New York, which was founded by Swami Vivekananda himself. He continued in that capacity till the last. He carried on Vedanta work in the West very successfully and ministered to a large number of ardent and sincere spiritual aspirants there.

Swami Pavitrananda was much loved and respected by his brother-monks, devotees and disciples. He maintained a spirit of independence in everything he said or did. He was a good speaker and thoughtful writer. Over several decades he steadily contributed articles to *Prabuddha Bharata* and other periodicals of the Order. He was the author of two short popular books, *Modern Man in Search of Religion* and *Common Sense about Yoga,* and the translator into English of the Siva-Mahimnah-Stotram — all publications of the Advaita Ashrama. He was polite and gentle by nature, easily accessible to young and old. He scrupulously practised the lofty principles of the monastic life.

He passed away on 18 November 1977 at 4 a.m. at the age of 81 owing to a stroke resulting from a progressive cerebrovascular disease from which he had been suffering for ten years.

Seventh President: Swami Yogeswarananda

Swami Yogeswarananda, known in his pre-monastic life as Krishna Sastri, and endearing in the Order as Sastriji, joined the Order in 1928, was ordained a Brahmachari in 1929, and received the vows of Sannyasa in

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1936. An M.A. from the University of Madras, the Swami had many talents which kept him engaged in a variety of tasks. He was the Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* during 1945–1947 and the President of Advaita Ashrama from 28 June 1948 to 1953. 'Shastriji's coming has brought enthusiasm and spirit among the inmates' truly represents how he was received at Mayavati. An old unused camera would draw his attention; he should understand the mechanism himself. He engaged himself even as the President of Advaita Ashrama in (a) laying water-pipes for domestic purposes and for irrigation [thanks to his ingenuity and hard-working nature, arrangements were made for collecting water from nearby springs and storing in large tanks for irrigation purposes], (b) developing the garden and orchards [for instance, the Swami obtained wheat seeds from Boshi Sen's laboratory in Almora; grafting was a hobby which kept him busy; at the annual vegetable and flower show at Lohaghat, the Ashrama's produce invariably bagged the first prize for vegetables.] (c) keeping watch over gardens and fields, day or night, to prevent damage by wild animals and parrots, (d) growing grass as fodder for cows [he procured a special kind of grass also from Almora for fodder], (e) maintaining bee-hives, (f) building septic tanks, (g) carpentry, i.e., making writing desks, (h) yachts for boating [the perfection of the Swami is revealed by the fact that his yachts alone proved to be 'lake-worthy'; on earlier occasions the boats capsized invariably, though harmlessly, as recorded in Diary Entries of 22 July 1915, 24 September 1923 and 6 August 1926], (i) holding scriptural classes for inmates, (j) bringing out a compilation of Swamiji's letters — *Salvation and Service*, (k) giving public lectures when necessary, especially on the occasion of Holy Mother's Birth Centenary.

The Swami left the Ashrama and eventually the Order in 1954. He passed away in 1997.

Eighth President: Swami Gambhirananda

Swami Gambhirananda, born on 11 February 1899, hails from Sadhuhati, a village in the district of Sylhet (now in Bangladesh). His pre-monastic name was Jatindra Nath Dutta. After graduating from the Scottish Church College, Calcutta, he served in military accounts department in Rangoon for some time and then joined the Ramakrishna Order in May 1923. A disciple of Swami Shivananda, he had his Sannyasa from his Guru in 1928.

He has an outstanding record of service to the twin organization. As Brahmachari Soumya Chaitanya, he became Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar, in 1926, and continued there up to December 1935, with a break in 1929–1931 when he served at Udbodhan. During that period, for some time, he studied Sanskrit at Varanasi Advaita Ashrama. He served as a Member of the Working Committee of the Math and Mission from 1936 to 1941, and again from 1944 to 1947, rendering valuable service. In the intervening period he served as the Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* for three years. He was later President of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, for about ten years from 1953 to 1963.

Swami Gambhiranandaji's editorials on various topics from different points of view earned the appreciation of everyone. It was during his editorship that the well-known artist Nandalal Bose's famous paintings 'Shiva's Consuming Poison' and 'Nataraj' were published in *Prabuddha Bharata*.

A fellow-worker who was a Brahmachari then used to type out Gambhiranandaji's editorials. Gambhiranandaji used to hand him the manuscripts and ask for his opinion. The Brahmachari found therein some grammatical errors and spelling mistakes and, after some hesitation, told Gambhiranandaji about them. Gambhiranandaji was least offended. On the contrary he asked the Brahmachari to set right whatever mistakes there might be according to his own

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judgement. The Brahmachari was surprised and thought, 'I am only a Brahmachari who has spent just a year in the Order, and he is such a big man — an Editor! He could not have spoken like that if he were not a real monk.' Anyone who worked with Gambhiranandaji would remark that they got joy from working with him.

During his Presidentship, the Mayavati Ashrama progressed in many directions. He had developed the vegetable garden, solved the problem of water supply, bought pedigree cattle and increased milk production thereby, and continued the bee-keeping. He had also brought from Calcutta varieties of flowering plants for the Ashrama's garden. Sri C.B. Gupta, then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, visited Mayavati Ashrama. Gambhiranandaji persuaded him to build a nine-kilometre road from Lohaghat to Mayavati, which he used to call the Mayavati Road. He also made the monks' quarters on the second floor of the house more suitable and comfortable for resident monks.

The Ashrama's Publication Department which was then at 4 Wellington Lane was facing difficulty owing to shortage of space. The work had grown. By a decree of the court, the Advaita Ashrama was granted possession of the estate of the late Upendra Narayan Dev of 5 Dehi Entally Road (Calcutta 700 014), who had left by a will the greater portion of his property for the propagation of the religious message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda as well as some philanthropic activities. The foundation stone of the proposed building was laid on 17 November and within a few years the building itself was fully ready for use. On 8 December 1960, it was inaugurated. A library and a reading-room were added some time later. It must be mentioned that building houses was something like a hobby with Gambhiranandaji; he had even studied many books on the subject while at Deoghar.

Gambhiranandaji used to encourage his colleagues in all their works. He was fun-loving and used to play pranks on them while they would play ludo after lunch. The monks knew this and loved him for that. A feature, 'Aranyadev', which the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* used to run in those days was his favourite.

Gambhiranandaji would never depend upon others for the least of his personal needs, a trait he retained all through his life. Nobody ever saw him taking a siesta. Afternoons were devoted to writing. He was absolutely punctual and one could set his watch after his routine. He was never late even by a minute. This habit remained with him until his *Mahasamadhi*. In the afternoons he would also teach Sannyasins and Brahmacharins. Pacing the verandah in front of his room, Gambhiranandaji would often murmur a song in Bengali, which meant, 'I, a fisher man, remain waiting, having cast the fishing net'. The spiritual significance of this song should be obvious to the reader. About Mayavati, many times he has been heard saying, 'See that the traditions are not lost; they must be protected at whatever cost.'

Appointed a Trustee of the Order in March 1947, he became one of the Assistant Secretaries in April that year and served in that post till 1953 and again from 1963 to 1966. Then he became the General Secretary and held that position till April 1979. Thereafter, he was elected one of the Vice-Presidents in April 1979, and continued in that position till he became the eleventh President of the Order on 9 April 1985.

Besides being a great monk and worker, the Swami was an erudite scholar too. His English version of the nine major Upanishads, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* and the *Brahma-Sūtras*, all with Śaṅkara's commentary, and Bengali version of ten major Upanishads, *Stavakusumāñjalī*, *Siddhānta-leśa-saṅgraha* have earned appreciation from all quarters. In addition to his translations, the fruits of his scholarship consist in some of his masterly works of an original nature. Of them *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* and *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission*, in Eng-

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lish and *Sri Ramakrishna-Bhaktamalika* (2 vols.), and *Yuganayak Vivekananda* (3 vols.) in Bengali, deserve special mention. He edited *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (in 8 volumes). He also compiled and edited *Apostles of Sri Ramakrishna*. He was engaged in translating into English, Madhusudana Saraswati's commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gītā* during the last few years of his life. He had completed the translation and was to edit it before sending it to the Press. These works are proof of the Swami's erudition and deep understanding of the scriptures. Thus, his literary contribution to Vedanta and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature has been immense.

He entered *Mahasamadhi* on 27 December 1988 at 7.27 p.m. at the Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta, whereto he had been admitted on 24 December with severe lung infection and cardiac problems. He was ninety. He leaves behind thousands of disciples and admirers throughout India and abroad.

Ninth President: Swami Chidatmananda

Swami Chidatmananda, popularly addressed as Alopi Maharaj in the circle of monks and devotees, joined the Ramakrishna Order at Kanpur in 1936 and was initiated into spiritual life by Swami Vijnanananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He received his vows of Brahmacharya and Sannyasa in 1944 and 1948 respectively from Swami Virajananda, then President of the Order. In his monastic life, the Swami served the Organization at Kanpur in various capacities, ultimately taking charge as its Secretary. In 1962, he was posted at Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, where for two years he was Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*. He was then appointed President of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, from October 1963. He was elected a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in November 1965. Finally, he was appointed one of the Assistant Secretaries of the Ramakrishna Mission in January 1969, in which post he served till he breathed his last.

The duties of his office took him to almost all the States of India. As a preacher who could speak with equal facility and effectiveness in Hindi, Bengali and English, he travelled in Burma, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Cambodia, Philippines and Japan.

His simple, lively, helpful and loving nature endeared him to monastics and devotees alike. He was admitted to the Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan on 7 June 1975 for treatment of heart ailment. On 17 June 1975 at 1.10 p.m. he passed away due to cardio-respiratory failure.

Tenth President: Swami Budhananda

Born in 1917 in East Bengal, **Swami Budhananda** was known as Bhavani Prasad Dutta in his pre-monastic life. He completed his graduation in 1938 from Dacca University and studied up to the final M.A. course without appearing for the examinations. He joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1944 at the Madras Math and worked there till 1959 in various capacities, including the editorship of *Vedanta Kesari*. An initiated disciple of Swami Virajananda Maharaj, the Swami received Sannyasa from Swami Sankarananda Maharaj in 1954. He was posted by the Headquarters to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center in New York as Assistant Minister in 1959 to preach Vedanta. He successfully conducted the work there and also in San Francisco and Hollywood centres for about seven years in all. He returned to India in 1966 and took up the charge of the Chandigarh centre. He came to Mayavati in 1968 as the Joint Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, and in 1969 he was appointed President of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, as well as Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*. Scholarly and contemplative by nature, the Swami has to his credit a number of books and articles, both in English and Bengali. *The Mind and Its Control*, *Can One be Scientific and Yet Spiritual?*, *The Saving Challenge of Religion*, etc. are a few of his books that have gained the admiration of both spiritual

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seekers and modern rational minds. His meticulous attention to details and profound erudition are two of the distinctive features of his writings. His oratorical powers and organizing faculty are well proved by the grand success of the youth conventions organized by him at New Delhi. Somewhat reserved, yet warm and affectionate, the Swami was respected and loved by all. He passed away on 11 June 1983 at 6 p.m. at the Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta, where he had been admitted when condition took a serious turn following a cerebral stroke.

Twelfth President: Swami Tadrupananda

Swami Tadrupananda, was born in June 1932 at Koppa, Dist. Chikamagalur, near Bangalore. After graduation in Science from Central College, Bangalore, he joined the Ramakrishna Order in June 1952 at the local Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama. He was an initiated disciple of Swami Yatiswarananda. He was ordained into Sannyasa in May 1962.

He started his monastic life at Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore, and then was transferred to Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, where he spent about 8 years doing various types of work. In July 1960 he was transferred back to the centre at Bangalore where he spent about 9 more years, during the last five years of which he worked as a successful and popular Warden of the Vidyarthi Mandiram (Students' Home). He was Joint Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* for 6 years from 1971 to 1976 inclusive, creditably conducting the magazine from the editorial office at Mayavati, and writing numerous thought-provoking editorials. He was elected President of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, in April 1977.

Swami Tadrupananda was a good speaker, an impressive writer, and had scholarly attainments and pursuits. He possessed an amiable and gentle disposition. He was well known for his openness of mind, largeness of heart, and more than usual dedication to the work allotted to him. Brother monks and devotees spoke admiringly of his qualities of warm affection, unhesitating trust, readiness to forgive, and simplicity of habits.

He had gone to Bareilly from Mayavati in order to see off some close friends on 3 May 1978. He felt indisposed that evening and went to stay with a friend at his house. His condition gradually grew worse on the following two days, and on 5 May, at the age of 45, he passed away. It seems to have been a case of sunstroke, followed by gastro-enteritis complications.

Fourteenth President: Swami Swananda

Swami Swananda, known in his premoastic life as Sunil Kumar Mukherjee and an initiated disciple of Swami Virajananda, joined the Ramakrishna Order at Belur in 1947. He received his initiation in 1948 from Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, and the vows of Brahmacharya in 1953 and of Sannyasa in 1957 both from Swami Sankarananda. He was a B.Com from the University of Calcutta. He served the Ramakrishna Order as the Heads of the centres at Patna, Saradapitha, Berkeley (U.S.A.), New Delhi and Mayavati (1988–1990). He also served the Order in various capacities at Cherrapunjee, Rangoon Society, and the Headquarters Office. The last three years of his life he spent as a retired monk at the Varanasi Home of Service. He was held in great respect and admiration by the monks of the Order for his unassuming and austere nature, simplicity, and scholarly pursuits. On 18 May 1997, he fell down in his room itself and had a deep cut in the forehead which was immediately stitched. He however became unconscious owing to severe haemorrhage in the brain and remained in coma till he passed away on 25 May at 4.15 p.m. at the Varanasi Home of Service hospital. ❐

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The Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas

The Period from 1899 to 1998: A Survey

SWAMI SATYAPRIYANANDA

The Objectives

In beginning the narration of the brief history of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Swami Virajananda, the second President of the Ashrama (and later, the sixth President of the Ramakrishna Order), reproduced the 'The Prospectus of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Almora, Himalayas,' written by Swami Vivekananda in a letter in March 1899.

This prospectus lists the objectives of the Ashrama. The activities of the Ashrama for many years since inception were directed to achieving these objectives through three general heads: (i) training, preaching and literary work, (ii) educational works, and (iii) charitable works. The report for the period 1899–1913 also details what was contemplated under these three types of works. This was perhaps possible because of Swami Vivekananda's detailed instructions to Swami Swarupananda, the first President of the Ashrama, on what he expected from his priceless jewel. Though we shall describe Swamiji's visit to Advaita Ashrama later in this survey, we need to describe here an interesting event of that time:

In discussing his plans for future activities at the Advaita Ashrama, Swamiji would be overcome with emotion. One day he outlined in detail all the services he desired to be carried on in the Mayavati Ashrama. Listening gravely, Swarupananda willingly accepted responsibility for all these projects, but added that this would be possible only if his assistants would remain for at least three years, helping him wholeheartedly in the undertaking. Without delay Swamiji called all the workers together and asked if all of them were agreeable to this. With characteristic independence, Swami Virajananda candidly answered,

> For a long time I have had a desire to live in seclusion [such as that at Mayavati seeing which site on his arrival reminded him of his boyhood wish and 'longing to run away with Khagen (later, Swami Vimalananda) to the Himalayas to live a life of intense austerity'] and to spend my time wholly in austerities, begging my food from door to door.

Disturbed on hearing this, Swamiji attempted to dissuade him:

> Why spoil your health by severe austerities? Just see how broken down is our health as a result of continued austerities. What is the gain in it? Please learn from our experience. Moreover, how long can you really meditate? Five minutes, perhaps. Why, if the mind is stilled even for one minute, that would be enough! For this purpose, some time should be spent in the morning and evening in *Japam* and *Dhyana*. But one must occupy oneself during the rest of the day in scriptural study and work for the good of the world. I want my disciples to feel more inclined towards work than to personal austerities.

Swami Virajananda, however, was unshaken and firmly contended that, though Swamiji's statement was true, to gain purity of character and spiritual power, religious austerities are absolutely essential; otherwise it is impossible to perform *Nishkama Karma* (selfless work). Though Swamiji, faced with this obduracy, furiously reproved Swami Virajananda, yet when the latter left the room, Swamiji told the others, 'What Kalikrishna [Swami Virajananda] says is actually correct, for what is there equal to meditation and the free life of a Sannyasin?' In spite of this approval of Virajananda's stand, Swami Virajananda accepted Swamiji's counsel and served Mayavati wholeheartedly. This total dedication to his Guru's command is seen

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reflected in his laying down the stipulation, as we shall see later on, that 'such a one [one who joins the Advaita Ashrama as a novice] is expected to work here for 3 years at least'. (*Vedanta Kesari*, January 1982, pp. 23–7; see also *The Story of an Epoch — Swami Virajananda and His Times.*)

Subsequent reports of the Advaita Ashrama give additional information regarding the progress of works in the three departments from time to time. The important features are as follows:

I. Training, Preaching and Literary Work

This was sought to be achieved through: (i) Training of members as workers and teachers, (ii) Delivering lectures and conversational or epistolary intercourse, and (iii) Bringing out literature.

A. Training of Members as Workers and Teachers

Regarding the eligibility to become a worker/teacher and the nature of the training imparted, the Report (1899–1913) states:

> Those who giving up all private concerns desire to devote themselves exclusively to self-improvement and the furtherance of the objects of the Ashrama are admitted as inmates and trained to be workers and teachers. The inmates are allotted such works at the Ashrama, manual and intellectual, as they are fitted to do, or capable of doing. This helping in the general work of the Ashrama, practised in the spirit of Karma Yoga, takes up 5 or 6 hours daily. For the rest of the day the members are free to practise self-improvement by private and class study, meditation and *japam*. Classes are held on Western and Eastern philosophy, the former in English, and the latter in English, Sanskrit or Bengali, as is convenient [several texts used to be read such as the *Brahma-sūtras, Chhandogya Upaniṣad, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Yogavāsiṣṭha*—in Bengali—, *Bhagavad-Gītā, Rāmcaritmānas, Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmṛta* — the Bengali original of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*—, Swamiji's works, portions from the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* after it was written, and sometimes it was an important article of Swami Saradananda which appeared in the *Udbodhan* — the Bengali monthly journal of the Order; at times there was the recital of the *Rāmāyaṇa*; there were during certain periods in its past history, Sunday elocution classes / extempore speeches, aimed at preparing individuals for preaching Vedanta and for giving concrete expression to their thoughts on current problems of the day; the intellectual atmosphere was so intense that even examinations were held; sometimes even outside professors were engaged for the classes on special topics whenever they came as guests.] Manual labour includes press work, agriculture and gardening, and the supervision of other outdoor works. No external worship of images, pictures, etc., or any religious ceremony or ritual except *Viraja Homa*, is allowed.

However, it must be admitted that from almost the beginning (to be more precise, from the time of the third President), several days of festivity were observed with fast and feast, night vigils, songs and reading from scriptures, but without formal worship. To mention a few of these occasions, Siva-ratri, the birthday anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ma Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Saradananda (and other direct disciples too), Swami Swarupananda, 'Pitaji' (as Captain J.H. Sevier was affectionately addressed), Mother Sevier, Mother Christine (when she was present, with a feast), some other visitors too (when they were present, with a feast), Durga Puja, Jagaddhatri Puja, Kali Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Saraswati Puja, Sri Krishna Janmashtami, Ras Purnima, Christmas, Moharrum (at least once). Depending on the occasion, there was Ramnam — sometimes on the *Ekadasi* days and sometimes on Purnima (full-moon) and Amavasya (new-moon) days, Gita (select chapters), Sri Sri Chandi, Christmas Carol and reading from the Holy Bible. *Jai* (hail!) to the great ones were issued from the participants in merry-making on the occasion of the festivities.

It must be admitted that occasionally

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some thought was bestowed by the inmates on whether and which of these were in strict conformity with Advaita spirit and the Trust Deed. The Trust Deed itself provides, observes Swami Mumukshanandaji Maharaj, that the Trustees—

> have power to regulate how the objects of the said Advaita Ashrama are to be carried out and all other matters connected therewith and to do and perform all acts, matters and things which shall appear to them conducive to the propagation, advancement or furtherance of the objects of the said Advaita Ashrama provided always that in as much as it would be doing violence to the principles of the Advaita Philosophy to worship any images or pictures or the like or to practise any religious ceremonies or perform any ritual other than the *Viraja Homa*, the trustees shall be bound to see that no such worship, practice or performance is carried on or attempted upon the Trust property of the said Advaita Ashrama provided always that any member of the said Advaita Ashrama shall be at liberty to use beads in private and to keep pictures in his room so long as they are not worshipped or made the subject of external ceremonial provided also that *Sadhana* if practised shall consist of Japam or Ashtanga Yoga or unselfish work without attachment or the 'neti, neti' method....

Regarding admission to the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, the report (Report 1899–1910) states: 'for the last 3 years it has been the rule not to admit any Brahmacharin except through the Belur Math, and such a one is expected to work here for 3 years at least.' At present, admission to the Ramakrishna Order through Advaita Ashrama is made as per the directions and guidelines of the Headquarters at Belur.

B. Delivering Lectures and Conversational or Epistolary Intercourse

The first report mentions in this connection three monastic members, Swami Swarupananda, the first President, Swami Vimalananda, and Swami Virajananda, the second President and the writer of that report — all three being disciples of the illustrious Swami Vivekananda under whose inspiration the Ashrama itself came into existence. Swami Swarupananda set the trend by going every year or so to many places in the United Provinces and Rajputana where he invariably succeeded in creating a deep interest in Advaita Vedanta by his life and teachings, through conversations and lectures among the higher and middle classes. In this capacity he also visited Almora, Naini Tal, Pilibhit, Delhi, Allahabad and Kishangarh. At the tender age of 38 he died of pneumonia at Naini Tal on 27 June 1906. Swami Vivekananda had sensed quite early that his beloved disciple, like the latter's own Master, was slowly but steadily working himself to death. So he wrote to Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita) on 12 November 1901:

> Swarupananda had his heart weakened by the constant uphill and downhill. He is here and improving. [*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1997), vol. 9, p. 168. Hereafter *CW.*]

Swami Swarupananda delivered two public lectures in Allahabad in February 1903, as also did Swami Vimalananda, which made such an impression upon the local gentry that they came forward with an earnest request to them to open a centre there assuring them of their full support. Swam Vimalananda also did good work in Naini Tal for two months in 1902, and at Bangalore during 1905 and 1906. Swami Virajananda, as the second President of the Ashrama, visited most of the towns in the United Provinces, Punjab, Sind, Kathiawar and also some in Bombay Presidency and Rajputana, during his tour from November 1901 to August 1902 in the interest of *Prabuddha Bharata*, and had much opportunity of coming in touch with educated men in every sphere of life, and making them feel interested in the life, work and mission of Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Virajananda was succeeded by Swami Prajnananda in December 1913 as the third President [in fact, Swami Brahmananda

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was to have been the next President, and Swami Virajananda agreed to remain as the President and Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* till Swami Brahmananda was legally and formally selected (Diary Entry of 12 November 1913). However, Swami Prajnananda was appointed President in a meeting of the Trustees of Advaita Ashrama (Diary Entry of 30 March 1916)]. Through regular correspondence with many inquirers, Swami Prajnananda used to solve their doubts on spiritual matters. In his tour through Allahabad and Lucknow in 1915, Swami Prajnananda held public conversazioni which were well attended and quite successful in stimulating public interest.

Consequent on the untimely death of Swami Prajnananda in April 1918, Swami Madhavananda [later the ninth President of the Ramakrishna Order] became the fourth President. He visited Bombay in 1919, where amongst other things he helped to quicken the Vedanta movement. Since 1921 he toured almost every year through the United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces and Kathiawar (with Swami Avinashananda), and succeeded in rousing the interest in the Movement of those who came in contact with him. Swami Nikhilananda too did excellent preaching work at this time in the United Provinces, Rajputana, Gujarat and Kathiawar, giving a number of lectures to cultured audiences which were all highly appreciated. He also aroused the interest of several Indian Ruling Princes in the cause of Vedanta and in enlisting their active sympathy in the activities of the Advaita Ashrama. Swami Madhavananda opened a new centre of the Ramakrishna Order at Rajkot in March 1927 — a direct result of his and that of Swami Nikhilananda's tour in those parts in the previous years.

In April 1927, Swami Madhavananda being required to take charge of the Hindu Temple and the Vedanta Work at San Francisco (California, U.S.A.), Swami Vireswarananda [later the tenth President of the Ramakrishna Order] succeeded him as the fifth President of the Ashrama. He made extensive tours in South India in the years 1928 and 1929, delivering several lectures and holding conversazioni and classes which were much appreciated. In 1930 he visited several parts of the United Provinces. In 1929 Swami Vijayananda toured through Bihar and the United Provinces, and in 1930, Swami Nityaswarupananda toured through Bengal and some parts of Assam enlightening many on religious topics.

In 1937 Swami Pavitrananda took over as the sixth President from Swami Vireswarananda. In 1940 he delivered a course of public lectures organized at the Dacca University by the Committee of Religious Instruction for Hindu Students. In 1942 he undertook a tour in Northern India and delivered some lectures and discourses in Lahore, Delhi, Allahabad and other places. Towards the close of 1945 he started for a tour in South India and went as far as Ceylon delivering lectures and discourses in Madras (now Chennai), Bangalore, Ootacamund, Alleppy, Trivandrum (now Thiruvananthapuram), Trichinopoly (now Tiruchirapally), Colombo, Batticaloa and several other places.

In 1948 Swami Yogeswarananda became the seventh President. He was followed by Swami Gambhirananda (eighth President, 1953–1963; later the eleventh President of the Ramakrishna Order), Swami Chidatmananda (ninth, 1964–1968), Swami Budhananda (tenth, 1969–1976), Swami Vandanananda (eleventh, 1976–1977; later the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission), Swami Tadrupananda (twelfth, 1977–1978), Swami Ananyananda (thirteenth, 1978–1988), Swami Swananda (fourteenth, 1988–1990); Swami Mumukshananda took over as the fifteenth President on 7 December 1990 (he joined the Ashrama at the end of January 1991) and continues till date.

Swami Yogeswarananda, who was the President of the Ashrama till 3 November 1953 delivered lectures in different parts of

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India. Swami Gambhirananda who succeeded him too lectured in different parts of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. Swami Nihsreyasananda (Editor, *Prabuddha Bharata*) too addressed some public meetings in West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.

Swami Chidatmananda, who succeeded Swami Gambhirananda, addressed public meetings in Assam, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Presidents who succeeded thereafter too maintained the tradition of giving lectures and meeting visitors as well as solving many doubts concerning spiritual matters, though it must be admitted that many other centres came up in Uttar Pradesh and monks of these centres fulfilled the local needs.

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhāva Prachār

Right from the beginning, the monks of the Ashrama have worked hard to popularize the life and teachings of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda among the villagers, especially students and teachers. On the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and on other similar occasions, Swamis visited schools and colleges around the locality as well as in distant places in the Kumaon area, gave talks, held symposia, and distributed books. In connection with Swamiji's Birth Centenary Celebration, meetings were organized by the Ashrama at Lohaghat, Champavat and Pithoragarh. In addition to this, when students visit the Ashrama in groups or individually, they are given Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature free.

We give below some of the major events under this group held in recent times from Mayavati and from its Publication Department at Calcutta:

For some time in 1987 a *Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Samiti* met regularly at Sri Dhan Singh Dev's house in Lohaghat. The Samiti has a library of its own containing Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature for the use of the people of the locality.

On the occasion of the *Centenary Celebration of Swami Vivekananda's Bharat Parikrama*, a *Teachers' Symposium* was held at Lohaghat in collaboration with the local Ramakrishna Samiti on 16 October 1992, and a *meeting* was organized by the Calcutta Branch on 10 January 1993. Further, *7 public meetings and 18 meetings for students and teachers* in Pithoragarh, Naini Tal and Pilibhit districts were held during September and October 1993.

A *meeting* on 7 January 1995 in the Publication Department at Calcutta occasioned by the release of the *Centenary Issue of Prabuddha Bharata* was organized.

Lectures and question-and-answer sessions on 'Swami Vivekananda and Character-building' were organized in 17 colleges and schools in the district of Pithoragarh and Naini Tal from 19 to 27 September 1995.

Booklets on Swamiji's return to India in 1897 (*Swami Vivekananda's Historic Return from the West and Indian Awakening* and *To the Citizens of Calcutta*) were published and distributed to mark the occasion of the *Centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission and Swami Vivekananda's Return to India*. The Mayavati Ashrama too observed the occasion with a *public meeting* on 25 May 1997 in which Swami Nikhileswarananda, Sri Devesh Chaturvedi (District Magistrate) and Sri Om Prakash Arya (Sub-District-Magistrate) spoke, and mass feeding. Again, Swami Nikhilatmananda, Head of the Allahabad Centre gave a lecture on 'Swami Vivekananda, Regeneration of India and Ramakrishna Mission's Contribution' (in Hindi) in the Government Inter-College at Lohaghat before senior students and teachers of the institution on 18 May 1998.

The *Vivekananda Youth Day* was observed on 25 & 26 January 1998 by the Branch in Calcutta with elocution, paragraph writing, music, a question-and-answer session, demonstration of yogic asanas, in which 180 youths participated.

Gift of a copy of the *Selections from the*

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Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda and a few other books was made to about 7000 of the delegates who attended the *All-India Youth and Devotees' Convention* (held on 3 & 4 and 7 & 8 February 1998) through the Calcutta Branch.

All educational institutions including high schools and colleges of Pithoragarh District were given Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature under the *Enrichment of Library* programme. Inter-colleges at Tanakpur and Pilibhit were also given books for their libraries.

Monastic Preachers Sent Abroad

Many monks who worked, at one time or the other, in the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati (or Calcutta), were sent abroad by the Ramakrishna Order at Belur to take up the work of preaching Vedanta in the West. Special mention must be made of the following, of whom a few played the role of pioneers (*in alphabetical order*): Swamis Adiswarananda, Ananyananda, Ashokananda, Avinashananda, Balaramananda Brahmamayananda, Budhananda, Chetanananda, Chidbhasananda, Dayananda, Ekatmananda, Jyotirupananda, Madhavananda, Mukhyananda, Muktirupananda, Nihsreyasananda, Nikhilananda, Nishkamananda, Parajnanananda, Pavitrananda, Prabhavananda, Prakashananda, Raghavananda, Sachchidananda (Senior), Satprakashananda, Shantarupananda, Shantaswarupananda, Siddharthanada, Siddhatmananda, Swananda, Vamadevananda, Vandanananda, Vijayananda, Vividishananda and Yatiswarananda. [This list, we do agree, may not be exhaustive.]

To work in areas where English is not the spoken language, those monastic workers who were sent to such places had to undergo special coaching to learn the local language. For instance, Swami Vijayananda who was to work at Buenos Aires (Argentine Republic, South America) had to learn Spanish.

Space does not permit us to describe at any length the extensive work done by these untiring and gifted monastic members of the Order.

C. Bringing out Literature

Swami Vivekananda intended to make the Advaita Ashrama the centre, among other things, of the Ramakrishna Mission, for diffusing Vedanta teachings by means of a monthly journal and other publications in English, and the Ashrama, since inception, discharged this function with admirable and ever-growing success, notwithstanding all the difficulties in conducting a press in the midst of the Himalayan jungles, 63 miles from the nearest railway station (Tanakpur), and at a height of 6400 feet above the sea-level. Swami Vivekananda, while he was in Srinagar (22 June to 15 July 1898), had expressed much love for this journal and emphasized its role in educating the masses of India as we observe in Sister Nivedita's words (*CW*, vol. 9, pp. 368–9):

> At this time the transfer of the *Prabuddha Bharata* from Madras to the newly established Ashrama at Mayavati [Almora] was much in all our thoughts. *The Swami had always had a special love for this paper, as the beautiful name he had given it indicated.* He had always been eager too for the establishment of an organ of his own. *The value of the journal in the education of modern India was perfectly evident to him, and he felt that his master's message and mode of thought required to be spread by this means as well as by preaching and by work. Day after day, therefore, he would dream about the future of his papers, as about the work in its various centres. Day after day he would talk of the forthcoming first number under the new editorship of Swami Swarupananda.* And one afternoon he brought to us, as we sat together, a paper on which he said he had 'tried to write a letter, but it would come this way!'... [*Vide* 'To the Awakened India'.] (see *CW*, 4, pp. 387–9, for the poem 'To the Awakened India'.)

Though functionally situated in a hard-to-reach remote Himalayan jungle, the scenic beauty is admirable and the solitude enough to soothe one's nerves.

Prabuddha Bharata was edited and con-

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ducted with remarkable ability by Swami Swarupananda, aided by his brother-sannyasins, till his untimely death in June 1906, when the mantle fell on Swami Virajananda.

The Prabuddha Bharata Press and Office as well as the quarters of the Press staff being located within the Ashrama building, the quiet of the Ashrama was much disturbed by the consequent business activity and noise, and the inmates felt it rather distracting to pursue their study and meditation under such conditions. Desirous to remove such inconveniences, a beautiful spacious building built under the supervision of Swami Paramananda (not the disciple of Swamiji) was erected in 1914 as the Press House on the ground adjoining the Ashrama, at a cost of nearly Rs. 4,500. A two-storeyed house with veranda running all around, it contained 4 big rooms and 4 small rooms with bathrooms. A separate kitchen house was contemplated too but that did not materialize. The whole cost of the construction except a donation of Rs. 300 by a friend was borne by the Prabuddha Bharata Office (vide Report 1911–1913).

Regarding the laying of the foundation of the *Prabuddha Bharata* building, we have from the Mayavati Diary (Entry dated 22 May 1912):

> Foundation laid of the Press house & Store Room by Mother, followed by Swami, Doc, Dr. Bose, M[other]. Christine, Frank, Ashi, Fabu & ourselves including Mohanlal. A May P.B., the 1st forme of June P.B., a rupee, an anna bit, a pice, and a 25-cent silver coin were put in a glass bottle into which was further put a big card containing some lines to the effect that the foundation stone is laid today by Mother before all. The bottle was sealed with wax & laid at the south-east corner of the building by Swami at about 10-30 a.m. Sugar candy & biscuits were distributed to all present....

And regarding the inauguration of the building with Homa, we have from the Diary Entry dated 2 April 1914:

> Today, preparations are being made for the performance of Homa on the occasion of entrance into the new P[ress]. H[ouse]. In the evening Homa was performed, S[wami]. V[irajananda]. acting as *Tantradharak* & [Br.] Sitapati as the *Brati*. After Homa, a feast of Loochi, potato curry & sweets was given.

The Entry of 7 April 1914 reads: The printing Press was taken to pieces & removed to the new building. Years later, on 1 April 1919, the Mayavati Post Office came to occupy a room in this building and in September 1996 a telephone for the Post Office was also installed therein. In April/May 1998, the telephone communication was changed from the open line system to the MARR system.

There is a mention of other presses too in the Diary such as the Laxmi Printing Works, the Sri Gouranga Press and the Art Press which brought out many books. However, up to the end of the year 1923, the *Prabuddha Bharata* was printed at Mayavati in its own press. But, there was one problem or the other with the press: sometimes it was shortage of paper or of ink; or, it was some broken part — ink-roller, frame of the press-bed, frisket — which could not be repaired and replacement for which was not readily available. Sometimes the compositor went on leave to attend to some domestic needs which caused problems; the inmates had to learn composing! Sometimes it was difficult to procure types (both English and Sanskrit) for composing the matter. On occasions all the inmates had to sit together to write the labels on the envelope in the afternoon and evening (see Diary Entry of 21 December 1914; some spent whole nights also, vide Diary Entry of 14 August 1914)! But then, such were the occasions that called forth genuine appreciation from the recorder of the Diary. The Entry of 10 January 1921 reads:

> Br. Bhaba Chaitanya [Bhavachaitanya] has been very busy, working both in the morning and in the afternoon. There is no doubt that he is a very painstaking, energetic, and devoted servant of the Lord, and the Mission is fortunate in securing such an able and sincere Brahmacharin. The writer trusts that in course

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> of time he [Br. Bhavachaitanya] will prove himself a very valuable and worthy member of this Ashrama as also of the Ramakrishna Mission. He is also a learned man, a student of philosophy, and a man of elevated character. He combines learning with humility, sincerity with firmness.

These words convey a definite mandate.

There were also some problems in sending the *Prabuddha Bharata* issues by post: once the Post Office set a limit to the number of VPPs (vide Diary Entry dated 1 January 1923[1]) that could be sent in a day, which limit would be relaxed if the Ashrama members agreed to enter the details in the official records of the Post Office on behalf of the Post Office, and on another occasion, trouble arose because the Post Master at Champavat had gone on a long leave with none to attend to his work which necessitated lodging an official complaint. These difficulties of the post-war conditions necessitated the removal of publication work of the Journal to Calcutta in 1924 on the recommendation of the majority of the Advaita Ashrama Trustees, though the Editorial Office continued to remain at Mayavati in its own building as desired by Swami Virajananda and others. The January 1924 issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* came out from the Gouranga Press in Calcutta. Commenting on the changed get-up of the Journal the Diary Entry of 4 January 1924 says:

> The January Number of Prabuddha Bharata has been received today from Calcutta. It is printed in the Gouranga Press. There is much improvement seen in the printing & get-up of the paper.

We shall later see in greater detail the growth of the setup at Calcutta.

The technology employed for printing changed from time to time. For long the General Printers at Calcutta used to print the *Prabuddha Bharata*. However, with the advent of computers, the typing of manuscripts and page makeup for *Prabuddha Bharata* came to be computerized from the September 1993 issue, being a special issue brought out on the occasion of the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's participation in the Parliament of Religions. The printing of the journal was done in an offset press in Calcutta. In April 1996, a Pentium chip IBM computer with laser printer was bought for the *Prabuddha Bharata*'s use at Mayavati, and the work of publication came back to Mayavati in its essential part, namely, up to the preparing of the mirror-image printout on transparencies; the offset printing work continues to be done at Calcutta. Another Pentium chip IBM computer and an HP ScanJet 4c scanner which arrived in October 1998, have enormously helped in inserting photographs into the textual matter of *Prabuddha Bharata* at Mayavati and also in preserving old and rare photographs.

Every year, since many years past, the *Prabuddha Bharata* brings out a special issue containing illustrated articles from the pen of eminent writers. A few special occasions are mentioned below. 1936, the centenary of the birth of Sri Ramakrishna, was an occasion to bring out a special commemorative issue. In 1945, the *Prabuddha Bharata* brought out a special issue on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Journal, amidst great anxiety in the matter of paper for printing due to the stringent paper control which reduced the quota to just 30 per cent (vide Diary Entry of 10 July 1944). When the sanctions were eased to 60 per cent, it was a matter for great rejoicing (vide Diary Entry of 9 August 1944). In 1954 and 1963, special issues commemorating the centenaries of the birth of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and of Swami Vivekananda re-

1. About 200 V.P.'s are sent but as the Post Master, Champawat, is unwilling to receive more than 100 V.P.'s daily, Bharat M. accompanied by Shaji goes to Champawat to see the Post Master in order to settle this matter. He returned in the evening with the news that he was successful in persuading the Post Master to accept 250 V.P.s daily but we should have to enter the names in the receipt book which he would send here from tomorrow.

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spectively were brought out. The year 1965 witnessed the 75th number of *Prabuddha Bharata*. In 1986 the Centenary of the founding of the Ramakrishna Order and the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna were commemorated with a special issue. As we said before, in September 1993 a special issue was brought out on the occasion of the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's participation in the Parliament of Religions. Again, in 1995, the Journal brought out a very well-appreciated special issue on the occasion of its own Centenary. The year 1997 occasioned several centenaries: (i) The visit of Swami Vivekananda to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), (ii) The return of Swami Vivekananda to India (Chennai, Calcutta, Darjeeling and Almora; Andhra Pradesh also joined in the celebration in a fairly big way) after his first visit to the West as a conquering hero, (iii) Ramakrishna Mission founded by Swamiji on 1 May 1897, (iv) The first organized relief activity of the Ramakrishna Mission at Mahula, (v) The first Math in South India, namely at Chennai, which became the nucleus for many institutions which subsequently sprang up in South India. In 1998 it was the centenary of (i) the Ramakrishna Math at its present site at Belur Math, and (ii) Sister Nivedita's coming to India and becoming the 'Dedicated' as well as the founding of the Sister Nivedita Girls' School at Baghbazar. In 1999 it is the centenary of Advaita Ashrama (Mayavati, with its Publication Department at Calcutta).

It is proper to mention at this stage that the *Prabuddha Bharata* used to be printed on Double Crown Size paper prior to 1921 (192 pages in the year 1900 to 288 pages in the year 1921 of size 7½" x 10"). It was then changed to Demy Size paper from January 1922 (480 pages in the year 1922 of size 5½" x 8¾"), and to Royal Size paper from January 1929 (626 pages in the year 1929 of size 7" x 9½", the number of pages being 944 in the year 1995, the centenary year of *Prabuddha Bharata*).

It will not be out of place to list here the names of Editors, Joint Editors and Managing Editors of *Prabuddha Bharata*: Mr. Rajam Iyer (Ed. 1896 – June 1898), Swamis Swarupananda (Ed. Aug. 1898 – 1906), Virajananda (Ed. 1906 – 1913), Prajnananda (Ed. 1914 – 1918), Raghavananda (Ed. 1918 – 1921), Yatiswarananda (Ed. 1922 – 1924), Vividishananda (Ed. 1925 – 1926), Ashokananda (Ed. 1927 – 1930), Pavitrananda (Ed. 1931 – 1934), Maithilyananda (Ed. 1935 – 1937), Tejasananda (Ed. 1938 – 1939), Vipulananda (Ed. 1940 – 1941), Gambhirananda (Ed. 1942 – 1944, 1959–1963), Yogeswarananda (Ed. 1945 – 1947), Brahmamayananda (Ed. 1948 – 1949), Vandanananda (Ed. 1950 – 1954, 1976 – 1977), Satswarupananda (Ed. 1955 – 1956), Nihsreyasananda (Ed. 1957 – 1958), Ananyananda (Jt. Ed. 1959 – 1961; Ed. 1978 – 1988), Chidatmananda (Jt. Ed. 1962 – 1963; Ed. 1964 – 1968), Kirtidananda (Jt. Ed. 1964 – 1965), Adiswarananda (Jt. Ed. 1966 – July 1968), Budhananda (Jt. Ed. Aug. to Dec. 1968; Ed. 1969 – 1976), Rasajnananda (Jt. Ed. 1969 – 1970), Tadrupananda (Jt. Ed. 1971 – 1976; Ed. 1977 – 1978), Swananda (Ed. 1988 – 1990), Balaramananda (Jt. Ed. 1977 – 1979), Bhajanananda (Jt. Ed. 1979 – 1986), Jitatmananda (Jt. Ed. 1987 – 1989), Muktirupananda (Jt. Ed. 1990 – Aug. 1993; Ed. Sep. to Dec. 1993), Mumukshananda (Ed. 1991 – Aug. 1993; Mg. Ed. Sep. 1993 –), Atmaramananda (Ed. 1994 – 1996), Satyapriyananda (Ed. 1997 – 1998), and Sunirmalananda (Ed. 1999 –).

In view of the importance of Hindi as the *lingua franca* of India, a Hindi monthly named *Samanvay* (Harmony) was started by the Ashrama from Calcutta in 1922 [the first copy was received at Mayavati on 4 February 1922] to popularize the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda among the Hindi-reading public (vide Report 1899–1925, dated October 1925). The Journal was printed at Balkrishna Press, Calcutta, from the Calcutta Branch, first at 28 College Street, and later at 182 A, Muktaram Babu Street (as printed on the Journal). However, though giving its best in thought and language, the magazine had to be discontinued

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in 1929 on account of scant encouragement from the public.

Publication of Books

During Swami Swarupananda's term of office, 8 books and pamphlets were issued under the title 'Himalayan Series', and the resolution was taken to popularize Swamiji's ideas by bringing out, in a collected form, all his lectures, writings, letters and discourses etc., so far as these were available, after careful revision and editing.

In 1905 Swami Swarupananda started upon this gigantic task with his usual vigour and earnestness and continued his work until his last illness by when a portion of the first part of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati Memorial Edition) had already gone through the press and a further considerable portion was also ready for printing. The Western and Eastern disciples of Swamiji at the Advaita Ashrama undertook the work and devoted the whole of their time and energy for 4 years to bring this project to completion. At the time when Swami Virajananda was preparing his report (1913, the semi-centenary of Swamiji), 5 volumes of the *Works* of about 250 pages each and of the size 9½ by 7¼ inches had come out. Besides these five parts, the Advaita Ashrama had since 1907 published the following works: *Works by Swami Vivekananda:* (1) Jnana Yoga, (2) Bhakti Yoga, (3) Two lectures on Karma Yoga, (4) Modern India, (5) Epistles of Swami Vivekananda, 1st series, 2nd edition, (6) Epistles of Swami Vivekananda, 2nd series, (7) Lectures from Colombo to Almora, and *other works:* (8) Swami Abhedananda's Lectures and Addresses in India, and (9) Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita by Swami Swarupananda. Some of these substantial literary works were brought out on a hand-press in a difficult-to-reach hill locality! Today the hand-press, which was once sold as it was no longer in use to one Sri Ghan Shyam Punetha, C/o Pt. M.R. Punetha & Bros., Pithoragarh (vide Diary Entry of 30 July 1938), is back at the Ashrama due to the initiative of Swami Yatishanandaji (vide Diary Entry of 24 April 1994) and remains a mute reminder of those early days of hectic activity in the field of preaching through the publication of *Prabuddha Bharata* and several books on spirituality.

Special mention must also be made of the publication of the *Life of Swami Vivekananda* in 4 volumes of 450 pages each as also a popular edition of the same. The Ashrama also brought out the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, a comprehensive chronological account of Sri Ramakrishna's life based on the records of Swami Saradananda (*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* in Bengali) and 'M.' (*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in Bengali) in one volume of Demy 774 pages with a foreword by Mahatma Gandhi. Several other works were also brought out (vide Report, October 1925). In the January 1950 issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* ('Fifty Years of Advaita Ashrama', pp. 17–26) one finds a mention of the books published in English. Listed therein are: In *English: The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in seven volumes; *Life of Sri Ramakrishna, Life of Swami Vivekananda* in two volumes by his Eastern and Western Disciples; *Life of Ramakrishna* and *Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* both by M. Romain Rolland; *Spiritual Talks* by the First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna; *The Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Common Sense about Yoga, Paramartha Prasanga* by Swami Virajananda; *Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda* by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In *Sanskrit with English translation:* A complete translation of *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad with Sri Sankaracharya's commentary, Brahma Sutras, Bhagavad Gita, Bhasha Parichheda with Siddhantamuktavali, Ashtavakra Samhita, Vivekachudamani* and *Altar Flowers (Sanskrit hymns).*

There was also an idea to bring out books in Hindi containing the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda for the benefit of the Hindi-reading public (vide Report, October 1925). On the occasion of the centenary of Swami Vivekananda (1963), the Advaita Ashrama undertook the publication

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of all of Swamiji's works in Hindi in ten volumes under the name *Vivekananda Sahitya*, with financial help from the Central and some State Governments. This work was completed in December 1963. Publication of a popular subsidized edition of Swamiji's *Complete Works* in English was also undertaken on this occasion and brought out (see Reports, April 1961 – March 1962 and April 1963 – March 1964).

Publication Department in Calcutta

The Set-up at Calcutta

We do not go further into the discussion of the publication of books from time to time for the sake of brevity. Mention should however be made of the Publication Department of the Ashrama which was started on 1 May 1920 in a rented shop (in the first floor) at 28 College Street Market to sell books at a monthly rent of Rs. 34/-. From this first location it moved around 1925 to a small, decent rented house in the vicinity of College quarters at 182 A Muktaram Babu Street, North Calcutta, in consequence of an increasing volume of difficulties of directing a publishing concern from a place like Mayavati. The Calcutta establishment slowly evolved into a regular Ashrama, with about half a dozen inmates who managed its affairs. Study and meditation apart, other daily duties were allotted to each member. The establishment shifted to a rented house at 4 Wellington Lane (off Wellington Square), Calcutta, in 1931 [vide Diary Entry dated 19 February 1931], which was bought in 1948 [vide Diary Entry dated 6 February 1948] and thoroughly renovated. Here too the daily routine was maintained. The branch continued there till the beginning of 1961.

By a decree of the court, the Advaita Ashrama was granted possession of the estate of the late Upendra Narayan Dev of 5 Dehi Entally Road (Calcutta 700 014), who had left by a will the greater portion of his property for the propagation of the religious message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda as well as some philanthropic activities. The Ashrama intended to construct a four-storeyed building for this purpose and to shift the Ashrama from its erstwhile location along with its publication activity. The cost was estimated at about Rs. 3,00,000 of which only Rs. 1,00,000 was available from the U.N. Dev Estate. As the Ashrama was unable to collect the balance amount just then, only a portion of the structure could be completed with the amount available, and the Ashrama, it was intended, would gradually shift to this new place with its normal activities (vide Report 1954–1958). The Ashrama was opened by Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj, then General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, on 8 December 1960 (vide Report April 1961 – March 1962). It came to be occupied in March 1961 (vide Report April 1977 – March 1983). In addition to the Publication Department, the Ashrama now gets three additional wings: (1) An Auditorium, (2) A Library-cum-Reading Room, and (3) Distribution of Charities and Grants. These will be discussed a little later. The West Bengal Government bore a part of the expenses for the construction of the building and equipment, as also for the purchase of books. A sum of Rs. 1,00,000 was received from the estate of the late Upendra Narayan Dev as stated above, and the rest of the expenses was met either from the Ashrama fund or out of donations from the generous public (vide Report, January 1959 – March 1961). In the Report (April 1961 – March 1962) we find a mention of a telephone (44-1214) in the branch at Calcutta. Gradually two more telephones, a fax machine, and high speed computers (with LAN and E-mail) with both dot matrix and laser printers as well as a scanner were added in phases in keeping with the times. The entire work of publication of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta literature, and accounts including inventory management are at present done on the computer.

Auditorium

The auditorium with an accommodation for 300 chairs is meant for preaching the uni-

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versal moral and spiritual ideals propagated by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, as also for holding occasional discussions on allied cultural and other subjects. All irrespective of caste and creed are welcome to these sittings. The start was made on 12 March 1961 and since then weekly sittings are being conducted with encouraging results. At present weekly religious discourses are given on Sunday evenings in Bengali, and Ramnam Sankirtan or Kali-kirtan is sung once a month.

Library-cum-Reading Room

This was formally opened on 3 April 1961 by Dr. D.M. Sen, Education Secretary and D.P.I., Government of West Bengal (Report, January 1959 – March 1961). At inception the stack room had accommodation for 16,000 volumes with 2000 being actually present. Today it has overgrown its capacity, with 19,261 books! In addition, the free reading-room with seats for 32 readers has 104 periodicals including 6 dailies. The daily attendance all through the year is quite satisfactory, being 53 in July & August 1998. Many students of the locality find the library and reading room quite useful for their studies and there is a rush to enrol as members at the beginning of every month.

A lending section was opened in November 1963 during the centenary of Swami Vivekananda. A speciality of the library is that it makes available text books to the youth members of the locality. On an average, 52 books were issued daily in July and August 1998.

Charities and Grants

As aforementioned, according to the terms of the will of the late Upendra Narayan Dev as modified by the order of the Court, the Advaita Ashrama is required to preach the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, grant annuities to his legatees, dole out rice, cloth, cash, etc. to the needy, and grant money to selected charitable institutions. This work started in March 1960, and the number of people receiving daily doles has been rising (Report, January 1959 – March 1961). Since 1996 there are no more surviving legatees. Blankets (both cotton and woollen) as also *dhotis, sarees* and garments are distributed to the needy from time to time.

Publication of Books

Over the years, the Advaita Ashrama grew in size and reached many, far and near, through its Branch at Calcutta (to which the publication work was shifted in 1924). Today, it publishes Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta literature at very competitive and affordable prices without loss of quality of getup or printing using latest computer technology (203 titles in English, 37 titles in Hindi), and brings out photographs of exceptional quality (laminated and mounted) of the inspirers of the Movement. There is arrangement for the preservation of film-negatives or -positives as the case may be for the purpose of future printing, maintaining stock of unbound and bound volumes of various books, conducting a very busy sales counter, and managing the heavy pressure of inland and foreign despatch.

Preaching from the Calcutta Branch

A few monks are prominent in connection with the preaching work from the Branch at Calcutta (*in alphabetical order*): Swamis Bodhasarananda (presently Manager of the Advaita Ashrama at Calcutta), Govindananda, Ishatmananda, Nirjarananda, Purushatmananda, Samarpanananda, Shantarupananda, Shantaswarupananda, Siddhatmananda (who later left for Ceylon), Someswarananda (now not a member of the Ramakrishna Order), Sudhananda, and Vamadevananda. These cover names which are recorded in the Ashrama Reports (1939–1946, 1947–1953 and 1954–1958) and which come to our mind readily. We are aware, therefore, that this list must be incomplete. Many of those listed above conducted well-attended study-circles for boys. Besides these, the President of the Ashrama for the time being also gave classes in and around Calcutta during his stay there and also cov-

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ered other nearby regions on lecture tours.

II. Educational Work

In the early days, the Ashrama at Mayavati had the intention of starting a free boarding school for boys of the surrounding villages and for this purpose provided several of them with free board, lodging and education for about 2 years. As soon as the boys learned to read and write in Hindi and English, they were taken away by their guardians to be put to some employment, and so the school had to be broken up (vide Report 1899–1913). It is gratifying, however, that all of them earned respectable wages in various occupations. Since then, writes Swami Virajananda, the Ashrama had from time to time opened daily classes, Sunday classes, and evening classes to teach the boys of the villagers and the men employed in the Ashrama, Hindi, English and Arithmetic. But the freezing cold of winter with snow fall and the tendency of guardians to snatch away the wards from attending the classes always stood in the way of doing lasting work in this direction.

Again, the Report of October 1925 states that at the instance of a member of the Ashrama a primary school was opened at a village 4 miles off, which was subsequently taken over by the District Board. There are several Diary entries which quite favourably reveal the public appreciation of the educational activities, and the involvement and capabilities of the members of the Ashrama. 'There came an invitation from Lohaghat to take one of the Swamis here to join the meeting to be held for the improvement of the college at Almora' (Diary, 7 August 1914); 'The Ashrama sends Rs. 10/- and Mother Rs. 15/-towards the opening of B.A. class in Almora College' (Diary, 13 August 1914); 'Br. Bhakta & Atma [Chaitanya] went to Suin to pay a visit to the Pathasala that has been newly opened by Br. Atma C[haitanya]. A committee was formed with the villagers under the presidentship of Br. Atma Chaitanya' (Diary, 19 September 1915); 'Br. Bharat & Atma [Chaitanya] went to a village some 12 miles off from here to open a new Pathasala there' (Diary, 28 September 1915); 'Pdt. Narain Dutt of Pithoragarh came here to request our Mission to take up the charge of the Middle School at Pithoragarh' (Diary, 1 December 1916); 'Br. Mati Lal returns from Lohaghat at 11 am. He has been elected President of the Lohaghat Hr. School' (Diary, 16 November 1918); the Diary Entry of 2 May 1919 shows that Swami Prabuddhananda was involved deeply in spreading education among the hill people.

In subsequent years, attempts to start primary or other schools were given up because under the initiative of local boards and others, many schools came into existence.

III. Charitable Work

The Mayavati Charitable Dispensary

Moved by the extreme helplessness and suffering of the poor and ignorant villagers in times of illness, the Swamis, acting upon the message of Practical Vedanta, distributed medicines to those who came from long distances, and themselves went out to succour such as were too ill to come for help. As the number of beneficiaries increased, the Ashrama felt the need for opening a regular dispensary, under a competent physician. The services of a retired Indian doctor were secured for two years at the monthly salary of Rs. 30/-, free board and lodging, and the Mayavati Charitable Dispensary was started in November 1903 at the Ashrama. The Ashrama bore the entire cost of its maintenance for nearly 2 years spending Rs. 1030, as. 11, ps. 9, and then appealed to the public for funds. For want of sufficient funds, the Ashrama was unable to engage permanently the services of a paid physician, a diploma-holder. However, the work came to be executed efficiently under one or the other of the brothers, among whom Dr. H.M. Hallock and Swami Purnananda deserve special mention.

In response to an appeal for funds to

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build a permanent quarters of its own, and on receipt of part of the funds required, the construction work was started in 1912 under the supervision of Swami Paramananda (not the disciple of Swami Vivekananda). The building had two storeys with a veranda on two sides, and with six rooms: *on the ground floor*, one for three male indoor patients, one for three female indoor patients, an examining room, and *on the upper storey*, a dispensary room, a room for the doctor, and a room for a male patient who may want to come up to Mayavati for a change and pay a very moderate sum for his food and lodging. It was desired then to erect also an adjoining kitchen building (vide Report, 1899–1913).

Regarding the commencement of work of constructing this building, the Mayavati Diary Entry of 8 July 1912 reads:

> Foundation of the Mayavati Charitable Dispy. laid at 9-45 a.m. by the Mother & all.

The Entry of 28 November 1913 reads: 'Swami [Virajananda] gave Paramananda yesterday Rs. 100/- ... as present for his doing the two buildings [the Dispensary and Press], and Rs. 10 for his passage expenses to Tanakpur and Rs. 5 for a blanket.' However, this construction work came to completion in November-December 1914, and the inauguration ceremony was held on 4 December 1914 as the following Mayavati Diary Entries show:

> *1914 December 3:* Kalyan Sing is sent to bring coolies & the preparation for Homa is made for M[ayavati]. C[haritable]. D[ispensary]. building. The Ramnam Sankirtan is held in the evening & all servants attended it. *4:* The Homa ceremony takes place today. Br. Sitapati fasts and does all the works. We have a feast in the night. Mother [Sevier] attends the ceremony. Everything is nicely done. Prajnan[anda] M. plays the part of pujak [worshipper].

Repairs were however necessary from time to time. Amid great financial difficulties the slated roof of the building was replaced by one of corrugated sheets, states the Report of October 1925. The heavy deficit was subsequently made good by the kind assistance of the generous public, notably the merchant community of Ahmedabad.

Regarding this repair work, some of the Diary Entries are:

> *17 March 1923:* '27 big corrugated tin sheets,... are received this evening.' *8 June 1923:* 'The roof of the Dispensary has been overhauled and new planks have been set. The corrugated tin sheets will be fixed now but this is being delayed as the bolts & nuts have not reached yet.'

As the number of patients increased, a new Dispensary Building was constructed in 1937 with accommodation for 13 beds, though sometimes arrangements had to be made for as many as 30 indoor patients. Regarding the progress made in the construction of this building, the Mayavati Diary Entry dated 1 September 1935 records the need to make a formal application for Deodar trees for the new dispensary building; selection of the trees from the District Board jungle (Entry dated 18 September 1935); sanction of 8 Deodar trees from the Dhakna Civil Forest (Entry dated 1 October 1935); visit by Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj and others to the Chināi Deodar Bonni to select 8 Deodar trees (Entry dated 9 October 1935); that the Khāns, who had been given the contract for raising and carrying stones for the new Dispensary building, were to begin their work from the next day and that some of them had passed the night before at Mayavati (Entry dated 18 October 1935); stone cutting by Gopia Mistry and his men commenced on 24 October 1935, and the foundation stone was laid on 28 October 1935. A further application for timber from the Dhakna Forest was made (Entry 25 November 1935). The Diary Entry of 11 December 1935 records receipt of 'permission to cut down 6 deodar trees without any charge'. The building was opened in record time on 23 December 1936 by Makhan Maharaj (Diary Entry of date).

In 1938 the operation room (ferro-concrete flooring on 4 May 1938; operation table

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on 8 November 1938) was fitted with many up-to-date equipment. A small clinical laboratory was also set up. An M.B. doctor was also appointed to assist in the work (vide Report, 1939–1946). Grants from the Central Government enabled the Hospital to increase its equipment, and the Uttar Pradesh Government made adequate arrangements for water supply. Eight more beds were added in 1958–59 (vide Report, January 1959 – March 1961). In course of time, the number of beds increased to 35 of which 25 are endowment beds.

Some of the major donations/endowments received by the Hospital are: (a) *Endowments:* Vedanta Society of Northern California, USA: Rs. 3,47,498.82 in 1990–1991; The Maharaja Saheb of Morvi Endowment: Rs. 1,10,000.00 in 1937; Indians for Collective Action, USA: Rs. 1,07,100.00 in 1990–1991 and Rs. 61,038.00 in 1995–1996; American Service to India, USA: Rs. 1,02,923.00 in 1994–1995; Sitaram Bhartia Charitable Trust by Sri Pratyush Bhartia, New Delhi: Rs. 1,00,000.00 in 1983; Aspee Charitable Trust, Mumbai: Rs. 1,00,000.00 in 1995–1996; Virginia Varrentzoff, USA: Rs. 85,682.52 in 1990–1991; (b) *Donations:* Dr. Leta Jane Lewis through Vedanta Society of Sacramento in memory of Late J. Crawford Lewis: Rs. 77,291.70 in 1989–1990, Rs. 66,666.67 in 1990–1991, Rs. 1,98,859.38 in 1992–1993, Rs. 92,428.00 in 1993–1994, Rs. 62,440.00 in 1994–1995, Rs. 62,640 in 1995–1996; Vedanta Society of Portland: Rs. 61,972.25 in 1990–1991; M/s Jasani Foundation, Bombay: Rs. 50,000.00 in 1984–1985. The Vedanta Society of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, donated about Rs. 1,11,500 in 1986–1987 towards (a) the construction of a dormitory for the attendants of patients, (b) the cost of a trailer for the jeep, and (c) the purchase of new breed of cows for the Mayavati Dairy, with matching grants from the Alberta State Government, C.O.W.I. and C.I.D.A.

For the past several years, the Hospital has been catering to the medical and health needs of the following *Pattis* (each *Patti* covers about 112 villages): 1. Assi, 2. Septi, 3. Chalsi, 4. Bishung, 5. Gangol, 6. Regruban, 7. Talli Chalal, 8. Malli Chalal, 9. Talli Pal Balona, 10. Malli Pal Balona, 11. Talli Rao, 12. Malli Rao, 13. Rai Gaon — in all about 1400 villages. For the entertainment of the patients and their attendants the Hospital had, in the past, facilities such as a gramophone, a radio, a transistor radio, and a small library. At present the Hospital has a public address / music system also.

The Report also mentions a dairy at Mayavati maintained on modern lines with good pedigree cattle providing milk for the patients in the Hospital and for the members of the Ashrama. In October 1974, the Ministry of Agriculture granted a sum of Rs. 38,175 for the development of the Dairy Unit of the Ashrama.

On many occasions in the past, there were attacks on cows and sheep by tigers or leopards or wolves—sometimes fatal—, or the cows, their calves or sheep fell sick for various reasons. Blood gushing from the mouth, diseases in the foot and mouth, skin diseases, or ill-effects of eating poisonous grass are found in the Diary Entries. There were problems too with the milkman who could not restrain the temptation to dilute the milk. On occasions, the quantity of milk was too inadequate and arrangements had to be made to procure milk from nearby places. But, this arrangement proved to be quite problematic with the Diary Entry reading: 'no milk today'. So, Mayavati's own dairy is certainly a blessing, though it entails *some* trouble on account of the attention it constantly demands. Due to stacking of hay for fodder within the cowshed and possibly due to other reasons, the cowshed was not entirely free from threat due to fire. On occasions the cowshed had to be reconstructed or repaired. Initially the cowshed was located near the present 'new guest house'. Later, it was shifted to the 'upper garden' near the lake.

For the use of the Ashrama's Hospital,

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TELCO donated a new vehicle in September 1984. A jeep was purchased in December 1985.

Complicated cases were treated at/from the Dispensary: (a) influenza epidemic in 1919; (b) precaution against plague in 1928; (c) cases of tiger/leopard/bear/bull attack; (d) cataract operation; (e) removal of stones from bladder, to mention a few:

9 June 1919: The Influenza epidemic has broken out in Bishan and its adjoining villages. Br. Ananda Chaitanya goes to Bishan this afternoon with medicines to treat the patients & puts up in the Shiva temple there.

6 September 1916: Doctor, Satyen and Bharat went to treat a snake-bite patient. They were successful in saving the life of the patient.

2 November 1938: ...a patient mauled by a bear, with so many wounds on his head, hand, shoulders & armpits [came]. Dr. Swami dressed him & admitted him as an in-patient. The dressing took nearly an hour and a half, and all the inmates were present.

30 June 1940: In the afternoon Dr. Palladi of Lohaghat came here and helped us in an operation and from the bladder of an old man about 44 stones were removed, 12 of them being like big marbles!

6 October 1952: Yesterday night an urgent case for the hospital came at about 10 o'clock, when all had retired to bed. A young man had been attacked by a bull in the stomach, and he had come with all his entrails tied to the stomach. Dr. Swami and Dr. Babu got up and went to the hospital. Dr. Babu stitched the wounds as best as possible. They were engaged till about 1 o'clock. ...: The patient expired today evening in the Hospital.

Coming to recent times, in addition to the regular facilities offered by the Hospital, periodic medical camps to handle special cases are also being organized:

A *free Eye Camp* at Mayavati from 14 to 19 October 1995 in which 35 people were operated on for cataract.

A *free Dental Camp* was organized on 25 and 26 September 1998 which benefited 30 patients.

As and when possible, the Hospital has availed of the expertise of doctors and physicians who visited the Ashrama as guests. For their part, the visiting doctors took great pleasure in rendering free service at the Hospital. On some occasions they relieved the resident doctor to enable him to go on a short leave.

A Rest-house for Pilgrims

The Ashrama being on the way to the pilgrimage of Manas-sarovar and Kailash, many monks sojourn here for a few days. There being no suitable cottage to accommodate them, the idea of erecting a 'Pilgrim's Rest-house' in memory of Sister Nivedita at a cost of Rs. 400/-was in the air. An esteemed friend donated a sum of Rs. 100/- for the purpose (vide Report 1899–1913). Probably, this scheme finally did not materialize.

Relief Work

Besides the above permanent establishment for medical relief, the Ashrama has been sending out workers and raising the necessary funds for various relief activities. During the term of the first President, Swami Swarupananda set the trend by the following relief activities: (a) The Famine Relief Work at Kishengarh (Rajputana) and starting of an orphanage in 1899 [see appeal in *Prabuddha Bharata*, February 1900, p. 31 and June 1900, pp. 90–1], (b) The Ramakrishna Sevashrama at Kankhal in 1901 [see *History of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983), pp. 120–1, for an inspiring account of the role of Swamis Kalyanananda and Nischayanananda], for which last Swami Swarupananda begged from door to door in Naini Tal and raised a sum, substantial in those days, which he handed over to Swami Kalyanananda to start the work; this has now grown into a gigantic institution, (c) The Dharamsala Earthquake Relief Work in 1905 (see 'Ramakrishna Mission: Earthquake Relief Work', *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1905, pp. 96 and 139 for the report on the relief from 28 April to 6 June).

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Subsequent years witnessed, as occasions arose, relief operations from Mayavati and Calcutta. One such in recent years is:

Uttar Pradesh Flood Relief in 1993: distribution of utensils and food stuff among 164 distressed families of 42 villages in Pithoragarh District, and, as a follow-up, distribution of winter garments and blankets among 105 families belonging to 28 villages in the Champavat Tahasil of Pithoragarh District.

Guests at Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati

The Ashrama since inception was visited by a number of distinguished persons, both Indian and Western. Special mention needs be made of the following eminent persons: Mr. A.M. Bose, Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das and Sister Nivedita (on 18 June 1911, she gave a talk on the topic 'Intellectual Culture Needed Among Our Order' and held that no distinction need be made between secular & religious culture of knowledge), as also Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose (who found inspiration in the very air of Mayavati and delivered many lectures based on his pioneering research findings which were all stimulating and well received by the inmates and invitees) and Srimati Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, — who stayed for shorter or longer periods because they very much liked the place. Miss MacLeod and Sister Christine too came and stayed at Mayavati. The Report (August 1932) mentions the visit and stay of Major S.K. Nag (Indian Medical Service), Dr. Mahendranath Sircar, M.A., Ph.D., (Professor of Philosophy, Sanskrit College, Calcutta), Professor Upendranath Gupta (Professor of Philosophy, the University of Dacca), and Sj. Jogesh Chandra Chakravarti (Assistant Registrar, the University of Calcutta). The Report (1939–1946) mentions the names of Mr. Eliot Clark (Professor of Arts in the University of Virginia, U.S.A.) and Sj. Nandalal Bose (Santiniketan, West Bengal). The Report (1947–1953) mentions a few more names: Major-General H.L. Atal, Mr. R. Choksi, Mr. B.R. James, I.C.S, Mr. S.K. Mukherjee (Speaker, West Bengal Legislative Assembly), Major-General Shiv Datt Singh, Colonel Lakshman Das, I.M.S, and Mr. Devi Datt Pant, M.P. The Report (1954–1958) mentions the name of Sri C.B. Gupta (ex-Minister of Health, U.P.) and Sri Chaudhury Giridhari Lal (Minister, Public Works Department, U.P.). The Report (January 1959 – March 1961) lists the name of Shrimati Lakshmi N. Menon (Deputy Minister, External Affairs, Government of India).

Other notable guests as mentioned in the Mayavati Diary include: Swami Narayan, a disciple of Swami Ram Tirtha in September 1915; Madam Jean Herbert along with Sadhu Soren Sen in November 1949; Sri B. Lahiri, I.G.P. in April 1952; Swami Pranavananda (of Kailash) in December 1952 (Diary Entry dated 10 January 1953); Smt. Sarala Ben, a disciple of Gandhiji, in September 1954; Sri Achyut Patwardhan & Dr. Karve in June 1959; Sri P.C. Bhattacharya, Chairman, State Bank of India, A.K. Roy, would-be Auditor General, C.C. Desai, ex-High Comm. to Pakistan & Ceylon in June 1960; Sri C.B. Gupta, Chief Minister of U.P. in July 1961; Sri Golvalkar, the R.S.S. leader with 9 other companions in April 1964; Prof. Sankari P. Basu, in search of any material which could help him in his research work on Swami Vivekananda, in October 1968 and again in October 1986; Dr. Gopal Reddi, the then Governor of U.P. in May 1969; A British missionary team in February 1970; Mr. Sankar Dev Rao, quite aged and a Gandhi-follower, who was once the General Secretary of All India Congress Committee, in May 1970; Sri Prabhu Shankar in September 1973; Mrs. Boshi Sen and her brother, and some members of WHO in November 1973; Mrs. Marie Louise Burke in April 1974; Dr. Chenna Reddi, Governor of U.P. in September 1975; Vice-Chancellor of Kumaon University in December 1979; Christian monk Father M. Basil Pennington in September 1980; Mr. John Manetta (who translated *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* into Greek) of Athens in November 1980; Mahant Avaidhnath of Gorakhpur

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with his party in June 1981; Dr. Sudarshan (who as a brahmacharin of the Ramakrishna Order once served the Hospital at Mayavati and is now doing work for the tribals in Karnataka. He was given the Right Livelihood Award, considered the alternate Nobel Prize.) in June 1983; Mr. Pratyush Bhartia, of Delhi, in November 1983 (he came without prior intimation and stayed at Mayavati for a night, gave a donation of Rs. 2,100/-, and followed it up with a generous donation of Rs. 1 lakh for the Hospital); Mr. B.D. Pandey, Ex-Governor of West Bengal, with his wife and son, and Mr. M.N. Sukhla, Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court, along with his wife, in April 1985; Swami Akhandanandaji of Uttar Kashi reached along with a Brahmachari in June 1985; Dr. V.R. Karandikar with his wife in April 1986; Dr. Sacchidananda Dhar with wife in June 1986; G.O.C., Western Zone, in April 1987; Chief Secretary, U.P. Government (Mr. Kalyan Krishnan, ex-student of Madras Centre), in April 1988; Sri D.K. Ojha, Additional Chief Secy. to the Govt. of Tamil Nadu, accompanied by S.D.M., Lohaghat, in May 1988; the Governor (of U.P.), Sri B. Satyanarayan Reddy, with a big party of about 100 persons in June 1992; and Ms. Sita Ram Meena, D.M., Pithoragarh, in August 1996.

It will not be out of place to mention that almost every day general visitors, government officials, army personnel, school and college students, teachers of schools and colleges, visited the Ashrama and purchased books. They came from Almora, Devidhura, Pithoragarh, Lohaghat, Champavat, Tanakpur, Pilibhit, Khetikhan, Furti, Naini Tal, Bareilly, and other places, far and near. Many monks, not belonging to the Ramakrishna Order, either in the course of their wanderings or while on a visit to the sacred places, also visited and stayed at Mayavati as guests for short periods.

The Report (April 1977 – March 1983) mentions an old guest house within the Mayavati Campus which provided opportunities for brief stays of 3 or 4 days to a limited number of spiritual aspirants for which prior permission from the President of the Ashrama had to be obtained. A new guest house with more accommodation and better living facilities was constructed later (vide Report, April 1983 – March 1989), mainly with financial assistance from the proprietors of a reputed Calcutta business house. The foundation for the new guest house was laid on 4 October 1988 and inuagurated on 29 September 1989 by Srimat Swami Gahanananandaji Maharaj, then General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

In the course of its history, the Advaita Ashrama has been alive to Swamiji's intention of setting up this Ashrama as a venue for the exchange of ideas between the East and the West. Statistics reveal that during the period 1980–1997 as many as 156 foreigners from 25 countries have stayed on the campus and interacted profitably.

Other Events and Activities

Besides these, many regular and occasional events were held from time to time, far too numerous to mention. Some of the important ones are:

Tea Garden

Let us recall that the Mayavati Estate originally was a tea estate belonging to General McGregor. Even after it was taken over by the Ashrama, tea cultivation and picking was carried on. The production of tea was enough to meet the needs of the Ashrama. However, the problems associated with guarding the plantation from being pilfered far outweighed the advantage of having one's own source of tea. As a result this activity gradually received less attention.

Orchard

Apples and pears figured in the Mayavati landscape since inception. The Ashrama has its own apple orchard. Every year jam is made from the apples. The Ashrama garden also had, and still has, pear, apricot, walnut, cherry and parsimmon plants. In early days, the inmates used to send

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apple and pear jam to the Holy Mother and the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

The Government horticulture team attended on occasion to our fruit plants. They did a lot of pruning, digging and spraying, and even planted new saplings.

Afforestation

Although the surrounding forests are a source of fuel for the Ashrama, the inmates were, even from the beginning, quite aware of the necessity of replenishing the forest resources by periodically taking up afforestation activities — this was long before the present-day environmentalists raised a hue and cry about preservation of forest resources. To cite just one of many instances, the Mayavati Diary Entry of 11 July 1954 says: 'Nearly 1200 saplings of Deodar trees have been planted on the roads to Dharamghar and Lohaghat.' Other saplings planted included chestnut, oak and pine.

Mayavati Jungle Panchayat

The Mayavati Jungle Panchayat was formally created on 18 June 1948. The monastic members of the Mayavati Ashrama were also members of the Panchayat, and the Manager Swami for the time being was the *Sarpanch*. Guards were appointed to protect the forest from being denuded by village folk. The forests provide village folk with firewood and fodder for their cattle. It is very sad to say that all the surrounding hills are bare on this account, and a glaring contrast to the luxuriant Mayavati hills.

The Panchayat meets according to contingency to discuss ways and means of protecting the jungles and fauna from fires, poachers, and village folk in general as aforesaid. On occasions the *Sarpanch* had also to go to the neighbouring villages to warn people against destroying the forest under its jurisdiction. Suggestions are also taken from the local forest officer.

Control of Forest Fires

Burning of forests is a regular affair in the hills. This is because villagers get for their cattle more grass which otherwise would not grow due to the deposit of dry leaves and pine needles. But they overlook the fact that these fires also destroy whole forests. The Ashrama being in the middle of the jungle has to be on constant vigil during summers so that it can prepare itself to meet any threat to the Ashrama property and the forests under its care. As a matter of fact, almost every year fire fighting exercises have to be carried out by monastic members and workers of the Ashrama throughout the day and quite often even during unearthly hours of the night!

Water Tanks

The Ashrama for its domestic and agricultural needs depends on a regular supply of water. Unlike in the plains, water from natural sources is drawn via pipelines to reservoirs built by the ashramites. At present the Ashrama has six reservoirs, the main tank having a capacity of 20,000 gallons (90,000 litres); two smaller ones have capacities of 50,000 and 25,000 litres.

Melas *[Fairs]*

Members of the Ashrama never kept themselves aloof from the villagers and their hill festivals. They used to be invited to *melas* [fairs] during *Dussera, Holi, Radhashtami*, etc. The *Ramlila* fairs of *Dussera* at Lohaghat were a regular attraction to the inmates to which the workers also used to be sent with some pocket money. During such occasions villagers used to organize vegetable and flower shows at which the Ashrama almost invariably bagged the first three prizes. At least on one occasion, the Ashrama had its entry at a cattle exhibition in Champavat (Mayavati Diary Entry dated 15 December 1961). On one or two occasions the Swamis screened documentary films on Sri Ramakrishna and organized magic lantern shows at the Lohaghat Ramlila grounds. At the request of the District authorities, the Ashrama once opened a week-long book stall at the Lohaghat fair. Hindi discourses on topics like *Ramcharitmanas* have also been held for the benefit of the general public.

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Visit of the Direct Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna

In the next section we shall deal with the visit of Swami Vivekananda with whom came one of his brother disciples, Swami Shivananda. But for now we shall see the arrival of some of the other monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna as we see it recorded in the Mayavati Diary.

Swami Premanandaji Maharaj's Visit

1901 *7 July:* Swami Premananda arrives at about 8:30 with Suresh (who met him 4 miles past Devidhura) and Dhan Lal of Almora. Joydeva was sent to Almora with the Dandy in which S. Premananda came. *22 September:* Swami Premananda and Swarupananda leave for Calcutta at noon.

Swami Subodhanandaji Maharaj's Visit

1902 *13 January:* Swami Subodhananda and Chinta arrive here from Haldwani (via Pilibhit) after 3 p.m. *30 March:* Swami Subodhananda went to see the Lohaghat Hospital. *20 April:* Miss MacLeod and S. Subodhananda left in the morning. *10 May:* Miss Greenstidel, S. Sadananda, and Swami Subodhananda, Suren (Swamiji's nephew) and Gargi (Gangi?) reach here at about 5:30 p.m. *8 August:* Subodh Maharaj left.

1904 *3 February:* Letter from Gobind Lal asking to send Kanai Maharaj to attend upon Subodh Maharaj at Almora who is unwell. *4 February:* Govind Lal writes Subodh Maharaj is better and there is no need to send anybody. Prakashananda who got ready to start did not go to Almora. *2 April:* Letter from Subodh Maharaj that he will start from Almora on the 3rd. *5 April:* Subodh Maharaj with a coolie from Almora comes in the morning. *5 June:* All except Amrita[nanda], Mc.C., Subodh M. & Doctor go out to Dharmagarh & Ekhathiyanoula. *22 September:* Subodh M., Kanai M. and Mohan Lal go to fish down in the stream & catch some fish. *1 October:* Swamis P., Subodhananda, Kanai and Ram Chanda row on the lake. *6 October:* Subodh Maharaj has fever. *7 October:* Subodh Maharaj free from fever. *2 November:* Swamis Subodhananda and Nirbhayananda leave for Almora in the morning with Naria. *27 December:* Letter from Swami Subodhananda that no house is obtainable at Bareilly.

1905 *1 March:* News recd. from Mother that S. Turiyananda, S. Subodhananda & Krishnalal arrived at Pilibhit on 25th Ult.

Swami Turiyanandaji Maharaj's Visit

1905 *1 March:* News recd. from Mother that S. Turiyananda, S. Subodhananda & Krishnalal arrived at Pilibhit on 25th Ult. *30 March:* Swami Turiyananda and Amritananda came at 5 o'clock in the evening. Prem Sing comes back with S.T. *3 May:* S.T., S.P., R.C. and Mr. Natekar went to Dharamghar. *7 May:* S.T. S.P. R.C. and Mr. Natekar go to Lohaghat. *9 May:* Tailor comes and brings caps and long coat of S.T. Long coat of S.T. returned as it was too big. *25 May:* Swamis see one leopard in the Ashrama compound under the wild pear tree. *4 June:* S.T., S.S. and S.P. go out for an excursion in the morning and come back in the evening. Chandan Singh goes to post and accompanies Swamis. *21 September:* Blacksmith Shakti brings Swami T's billstick. *1 October:* S.T., S. Prak, S. Param and S.K. go put signpost at the school-house. *18 October:* S.T. and S.K. start for Almora. Nayan Sing and Kshemia go with them.

Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj's Visit

1906 *24 July:* Swami Saradananda and Swami Kanai arrive at 11:50 in the morning. *2 August:* Narottam of Phoorty takes 3 notes of Rs. 100 each and gives the amount. 200 of Mother and 100 of Saradananda. *6 August:* Swami Saradananda leaves the Ashrama with Swami Kanai at 2:30 p.m.

Visit of Swami Vivekananda

In March 1899, the Seviers and Swami Swarupananda began their work in the new Ashrama, making additions and alterations to the existing buildings. In July of the same year, three other disciples of Swamiji — Swamis Virajananda, Sachchidananda (Senior) and Vimalananda — joined as inmates of the monastery. As is always the case, those early

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days were one of untold difficulties and hardships in a remote place. There was austerity no doubt but these initiators were ready to face every difficult situation with calm and cheer. Strenuous work coupled with intense meditation characterized those days.

The hard work and austere life began to make its demands on Captain Sevier. He fell seriously sick and passed away on 28 October 1900 at the age of fifty-five. Affectionately called 'Pitaji' by all including Mrs. Sevier, the passing away of Pitaji was a great loss to the Ashrama and a severe jolt to Mrs. Sevier who however bore the brunt of the bereavement and continued her work calmly, bravely and with equipoise. The mortal remains of Mr. Sevier, in accordance to his wish, were cremated on the bank of a mountain stream, popularly known as the Mayavati river, with Vedic rites, with new silk cloth, ghee, sandalwood, camphor, etc.

Swami Vivekananda, then in the West, felt a premonition of Mr. Sevier's passing away, and cut short his programme to see his devoted disciple. He reached the shores of India on 6 December 1900 and, coming to Belur Math, learnt the sad news of Mr. Sevier's passing. Much was his sense of disappointment that he could not see his beloved disciple once more while yet alive despite his hurrying to India. On 11 December, he wrote to Miss MacLeod from Belur Math, 'I arrived night before last. Alas! my hurrying was of no use. Poor Captain Sevier passed away, a few days ago.' (*CW*, vol. 6, p. 439) In another letter to Mrs. Bull dated 15 December, he wrote, 'It was a tremendous blow, for sure. I don't know the future of the work in the Himalayas. I am expecting daily a letter from Mrs. Sevier who is still there.' (*CW*, vol. 8, p. 540)

Feeling an intense urge to visit Mayavati to console the bereaved Mrs. Sevier, Swamiji sent her a telegram informing that he would be going, and stating that the exact date would be made known before starting. Mrs. Sevier was well aware of the many difficulties. Firstly, Mayavati was situated in the midst of a forest, many miles from the nearest town or village, and so news was slow to travel. Secondly, there was not even a *katcha* road, and one had to travel along only bridle paths that snaked up and down the hills. So, to enable the Mayavati inmates to make the necessary arrangements, Mrs. Sevier asked Swamiji to inform her the date of his arrival at least eight days in advance. Though Swamiji had wired saying that he was leaving Calcutta on 27 December and would be reaching Kathgodam on the 29th, this news reached Mayavati only on the 25th. Swamiji had also sent a telegram to his Almora friend, Lala Badri Shah, in order to be sure that he was received by someone at Kathgodam. Lala Badri Shah had sent Lala Govind Shah from Almora to receive Swamiji and bring him to Almora. However, despite the delay in receiving the telegram, Swami Virajananda went from village to village, engaged some dandi-men and coolies at high rates, and brought them by forced marches to Kathgodam by 12 midnight on 28 December [*The Story of an Epoch*, p. 84], covering the distance of sixty-five miles in two days, instead of the usual three. Swamiji with Swami Shivananda and Swami Sadananda reached Kathgodam on the 29th at 5 a.m. and on hearing Swami Virajananda's achievement, exclaimed, 'That's my man!'

Though Lala Govind Shah pressed Swamiji to travel first to Almora, Swamiji decided to go to Mayavati on the earnest entreaties of Swami Virajananda, though he also decided to take a day's rest at Kathgodam to enable his tired disciple and himself to recoup their health before facing the hardships of the hill journey. The party halted at Bhimtal for the midday meal and halted at Dhari in the evening. They spent the night in a dak bungalow. The next day was a troublesome journey with rain and possibility of snow. Nearly at 3 p.m. they reached Paurhapani, and a little sympathy on the part of Swamiji for the dandi-men in allowing them a cup of tea, cost

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the party a lot of inconvenience, they being forced to spend the night in what they called that 'awful hole'. That was coincidentally the night which marked the passing of the nineteenth century and the advent of the twentieth. Next morning the party continued their journey through twelve inches of snow. Interestingly, Swamiji was charmed by the scene of snow-covered hills and trees, and often exclaimed, pointing to some ugly snow-capped stump or boulder, 'Look, how snow makes everything beautiful!' The party halted for the day at the Mournalla dak bungalow. The next morning the snow thawed, and the journey to Devidhura and Dhunaghat was pleasant. The Swami walked a part of the way, supporting himself with a staff on one side and by the shoulder of Swami Virajananda on the other. How poor in health Swamiji was at this time can be gauged by his remarks: 'See, how weak and aged I have become. I feel even this short walk so difficult, while in former days I thought nothing of walking twenty to twenty-five miles in the mountains....You see, my son, now I am coming to the end!' The Swami with his party arrived at Mayavati on 3 January. When he caught sight of the Ashrama and its building, he was much pleased. Reaching the stream in the canyon below, he heard the Ashrama bell strike twelve. He was so keen to reach the Ashrama that he mounted a horse and pressed on at full speed. The Ashrama had been artistically decorated for the occasion with evergreens and flowers. The joy of the disciples knew no bounds on meeting Swamiji after a very long time.

Unfortunately, during most of Swamiji's stay, Mayavati was snow-bound, so that he was compelled to remain indoors a great deal of the time; he could not take long walks, much as he desired to do. He was given at first a room in the first floor of the Ashrama. The cold being too intense, he moved on the 9th to the library room on the ground floor which had a big fire place (vide *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 567). He remained at Mayavati till the noon of 18th (vide *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 575). Though he was all the while in high spirits, Swamiji's health was far from being good, he suffered from asthma, which though not severe, alarmed those with him.

On the morning of the 4th, Swamiji went for a walk to the Lohaghat boundary, and rode back. Hail came on as they were returning and then it began to snow the whole day with slight remissions. About six inches of snow fell before it stopped in the evening.

On the 5th the weather being clear, Swamiji was better. It was all white snow outside. Swamiji on this day told Swami Swarupananda of his ideas regarding the work that he desired to be carried out at the Advaita Ashrama. This we have discussed earlier in the narration and so we desist from repeating it. Swamiji was full of Captain Sevier and his being a martyr to the cause at Mayavati. Sometimes talking on obedience, he said that 'obedience and respect cannot be enforced by word of command, nor can they be exacted. It depends on the *man*, upon his loving nature and exalted character. None can resist true love and greatness.' At the same time he emphasized the need for loyalty to the work undertaken, loyalty to the organization, and loyalty to the man placed in charge of a centre. Mother Sevier, Brahmachari Amritananda and Swami Swarupananda 'went out Champavat way in the evening and saw the footprints of a panther on the snow all along the path a good way and those of a deer ahead'.

January 6 was a clear day, though the snow had hardened with frost. On this day Swamiji received many visitors and wrote a letter to Mrs. Bull:

> Mrs. Sevier is a strong woman, and has borne her loss quietly and bravely. She is coming over to England in April, and I am going over with her. I ought to come to England as early as I can this summer; and as she must go to attend to her husband's affairs, I accompany her. This place is very, very beautiful, and they

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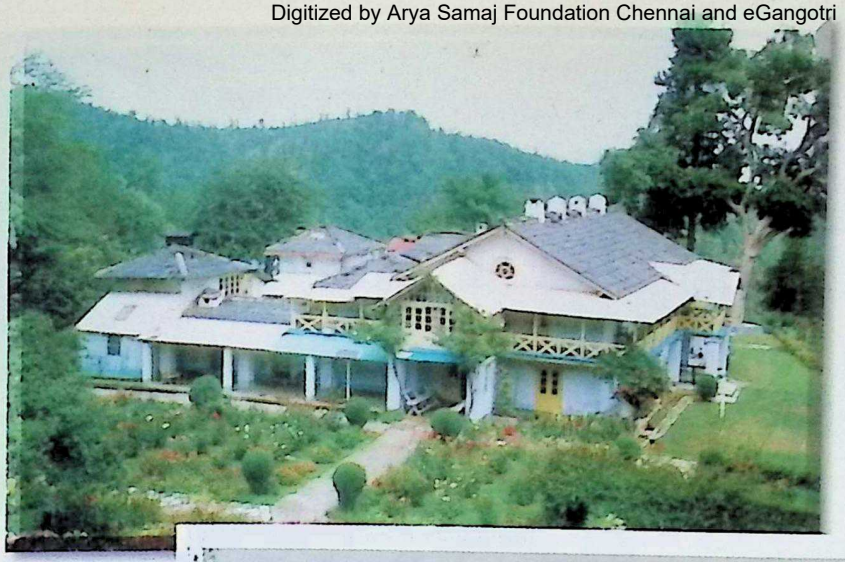

The Ashrama basking in the summer sun

Winter snow blanketing Mayavati

The Editorial Building of Prabuddha Bharata

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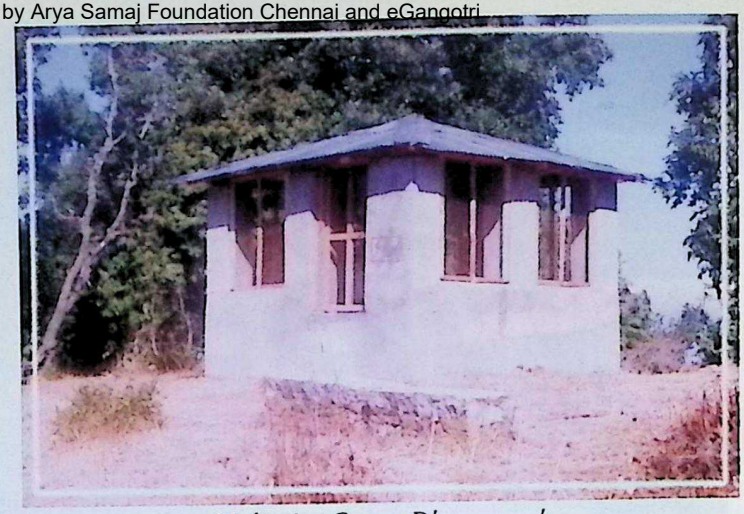
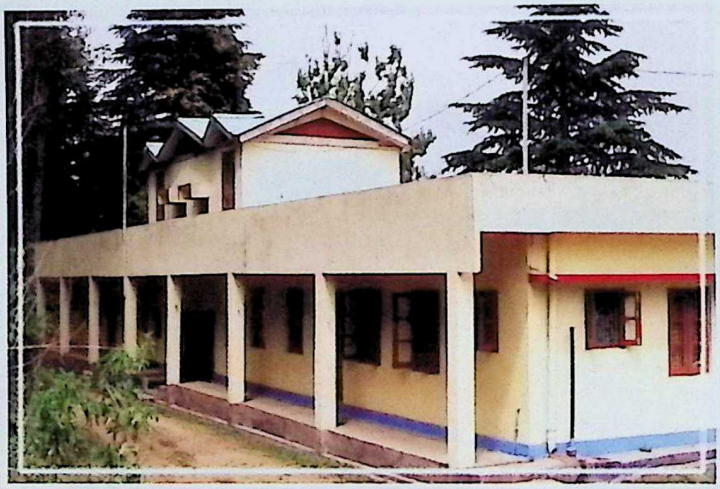


Meditation Corner, Dharamagarh



Ashrama's Guest House

Mother Sevier's Bungalow

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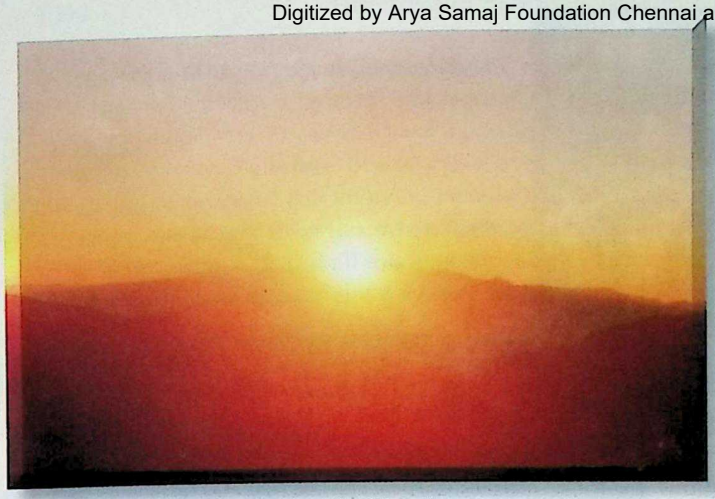

Sun peeping over the Himalayan mountains

Capt. Sevier's mortal remains were cremated here

A tiger being trapped in a nearby village

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Rhododendrons in the Mayavati forest

The Ashrama garden in spring

The Ashrama in summer

A budding artist's impression of Mayavati
Artist: Subhabrata Chandra

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have made it simply exquisite. It is a huge place several acres in area, and is very well kept. I hope Mrs. Sevier will be in a position to keep it up in the future. She wishes it ever so much, of course....It is snowing heavily here, and I was caught in a blizzard on the way; but it is not very cold, and all this exposure to the snows for two days on my way here seems to have done me a world of good. Today I walked over the snow uphill about a mile, seeing Mrs. Sevier's lands; she has made beautiful roads all over. Plenty of gardens, fields, orchards, and large forests, all in her land. The living houses are so simple, so clean, and so pretty, and above all so suited for the purpose....The snow is lying all round six inches deep, the sun is bright and glorious, and now in the middle of the day we are sitting outside, reading. And the snow all about us! The winter here is very mild in spite of the snow. The air is dry and balmy, and the water beyond all praise. (*CW*, vol. 5, pp. 151–3)

The morning of January 7 was clear. Swamiji with Swamis Shivananda, Sachchidananda, Mrs. Sevier and others climbed to Dharamgarh early in the day. Swamiji did the climb fairly well. Situated at a height of about 7000 feet, this highest point within the Mayavati boundary afforded the finest view of the Himalayan snow ranges. Extremely pleased, Swamiji wished to have a hermitage built there, where he could meditate in solitude. This wish of his was fulfilled in May 1997 with the building of a small 'meditation corner', work on which started on 26 April 1997. The Mayavati Diary Entry of 7 March 1966 gives 'Vivekananda Pitha' as the 'new name' of Dharamgarh.

His favourite was the lakeside. One day, walking there with Mrs. Sevier and others, he said to her, 'In the latter part of my life, I shall give up all public work and pass my days in writing books and whistling merry tunes by this lake, free as a child.' Many, perhaps in fond remembrance of Swamiji, used to take boat rides on the lake; the boat would capsize and the members would get completely drenched (Diary Entries, 24 September 1923, 6 August, 1926)! However, the heavy torrential rains and the flood water from the lakes which swept huge trees even, caused much alarm once in a while and the lake was drained often and on and used for growing wheat (vide Diary Entry dated 30 August 1950, 12 and 14 October 1950). It was also pointed out by experts that the lake might cause landslide and so the water was once and for all drained out during the time of Swami Chidatmanandaji Maharaj [vide information supplied by Sri Fakir Ram an Ashrama worker of those days (1950–1996, and since deceased) to Swami Mumukshanandaji] and the erstwhile lake used for growing wheat. Yet, one is reminded of Swamiji's visit and his strolls by the lakeside.

At the earnest desire of some of the inmates, a shrine room with a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna installed in it had been set up for some time at Mayavati. One day Swamiji happened to go to the room and see that regular worship was being done with flowers, incense, and other offerings. He said nothing just then, but in the evening when all were gathered about the fireplace, he spoke vehemently disapproving of ritual worship in an Advaita Ashrama. It should never have been done, he said. He quoted profusely many of the ideas enshrined in the Prospectus of the Advaita Ashrama but did not order them to do away with the worship-room. The worship was discontinued from 18 March 1902. After Swami Vivekananda's demise, Swami Vimalananda, who still doubted whether it was right for him to profess himself a member of the Advaita Ashrama when he leaned towards dualism, appealed to the Holy Mother in this connection. In her thought-provoking reply from Jayrambati (received on 7 September 1902), the Holy Mother expressed:

> One who is our guru [Sri Ramakrishna], he is Advaita. Since you all are his disciples, you too are Advaitins. I can emphatically say, you are surely Advaitavadins.

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> Convey my love and blessings to Mrs. Sevier. Let all of you accept my blessings....It is a woman's Math; stay carefully in the Math. Swamiji's strength is no more.... (vide *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 572)

On 8 January Swamiji did not go out. It snowed from 3 p.m. and stopped in the evening. Swamiji did not sleep well the first part of the night. On the 9th, Swamiji went out in the morning for a short walk to the Bungalow with Mother Sevier, and Swamis Swarupananda and Sachchidananda. In the afternoon he met Mr. Beadon, son of a former Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal and a tea-planter, who had come from Chirapani, along with one Pandit Kashiram, on invitation from Mrs. Sevier. They stopped at the Ashrama for the night and slept in the drawing room (*Golkamra*).

On the 10th, the sky was clear, and there was a grand view of the snow peaks. Swamiji complained of asthma the previous night. In the afternoon and the evening Swamiji wrote an article 'Aryans and Tamilians' for *Prabuddha Bharata*. (*CW*, vol. 4, p. 296) While at Mayavati, Swamiji was invited by Lala Badri Shah to be his guest at Almora, but Swamiji had declined and instead asked the old gentleman to come to Mayavati if he could. So, Lala Badri Shah accompanied by his younger brother, Lala Mohanlal Shah, met the Swami on 10th; and there was of course Lala Govind Shah who had accompanied Swamiji from Kathgodam. Swamiji slept in the sitting room (drawing room).

The weather was fine on the 11th but Swamiji was not well. The Tahsildar (of Champavat) with others came to see Swamiji. On the 12th, Swamiji was feeling better and went out for a walk. Lala Badri Shah had brought a sun-dial which he presented to the Ashrama. Swami Virajananda made a large, delicious block of ice-cream with the help of the thick slab of ice that had formed on the lake. This the Swami highly relished.

January 13 was Swamiji's birthday! He was thirty-eight. The day was raining, but Swamiji was feeling better and had had a good sleep at night. January 14 was Mr. Sevier's birthday; he would have been fifty-six had he been alive. On this day, Swamiji wrote two articles for *Prabuddha Bharata:* 'Stray Remarks on Theosophy', a sincere criticism, and 'The Social Conference Address', a reply to Mr. Justice Ranade's Presidential Address at the Indian Social Conference of 1900. He made also a translation of 'Nasadiya-Sukta' of the *Rig-Veda* at the request of a friend.

The 15th was a clear day with a little snow on the ground. The Swami went up to the lake and enjoyed a walk by its side. He also wrote a letter to Mr. Sturdy, whose wife had passed away, saying:

> So sorry to learn the passing away of Mrs. Sturdy. She has been a very good wife and good mother, and it is not ordinarily one meets with such in this life. This life is full of shocks, but the effects pass away anyhow, that is the hope. (*CW*, vol. 5, p. 153)

Lala Badri Shah and Lala Mohan Shah with servants left for Almora. Lala Govind Shah stayed behind.

Swamiji's disciples served him in every possible way during his stay at Mayavati. One day, however, dinner being exceedingly late, he became impatient at the evident lack of punctuality and seeming remissness. He blamed everyone and finally went to the kitchen to reprimand Swami Virajananda, who was then cooking in a room that was thick with smoke, blowing at a smoldering fire, and doing his best in the matter of cooking! Swamiji did not say anything then, but when food was finally offered, Swamiji said, 'Take it away! I shall have none of it!' The disciple knew well his Master, he placed the dishes near Swamiji and waited. Like a child Swamiji sat down and on tasting the food, found it to be delicious. All his anger vanished and praising the cooking highly, he said, 'Now I know why I got so angry; I was frightfully hungry!'

To Brahmachari Amritananda who was

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then at Mayavati, Swamiji said: 'You see how they serve me! To a Westerner, this devotion may seem servile, and you may be shocked at the way I accept all this service without remonstrance. But you must understand the Indian idea, then everything will be clear to you. This is the spontaneous devotion of the disciple to the guru. This service to the guru is one of the means by which the disciple progresses in spirituality.'

The 16th was cloudy in the morning, and very chilly. Lala Govind Shah left for Tanakpur. Chinta went to the village for coolies. Swamiji had had a good sleep at night. In the evening, Swamiji went for a walk with Mother Sevier. She wrote and sent a message to the Tahsildar, and in the evening he sent his horse for the Swami (perhaps to take him to the plains. Being confined indoors most of the time, Swamiji had become impatient to go down to the plains). Jaydeb went to the Tahsildar and brought back the dandi. The difficulties to get coolies even at high rates made Swamiji impatient.

The 17th, Swamiji's last full day at Mayavati, was cloudy. It had not been possible to arrange for coolies even by the evening. Swamiji had spent a bad night and so he began chaffing at the coolies having not arrived. To allay Swamiji's anxiety, Swami Virajananda said, 'Never mind, Swamiji! In that case [of not getting coolies], we ourselves will carry you down somehow!' Swamiji laughed outright and said jovially, 'Oh, I see! you are scheming to throw me into the Khud [canyon]!' Cedia went for the coolies at about 1 p.m.

On the 18th, Swami Swarupananda went to Chirapani to bring coolies from Mr. Beadon's tea estate, and had ten of them sent to Mayavati by 11.30 a.m. But by this time the person who had been sent from Mayavati two or three days before managed to engage coolies in the nearby villages, and had returned with the required number. So those collected by Swami Swarupananda had to be dismissed with sufficient recompense. On the way Swamiji, who started from Mayavati by noon (vide *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 575), met Swami Swarupananda (who had left Chirapani at 12.30 p.m. and encountered a little hail on the way), and the latter accompanied Swamiji as far as Champavat. There they stopped for the night in the dak bungalow.

We bring our narration of the main episodes to a close at this stage reminding our readers of the immense association that Mayavati has with some of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, particularly Swamiji, and of Swamiji's objective in setting up this Ashrama at the Himalayan heights. It is for the inmates and the visiting guests to live up to Swamiji's expectation, to train themselves to live and breathe with Advaitic consciousness and realization. Alertness, communion with Nature, same-sightedness, solitude, silence, sincere spiritual practices, self-examination, study — all aimed at self-improvement are, no doubt, the watchwords in this endeavour.

Acknowledgement: The author is grateful to Revered Swami Mumukshanandaji Maharaj, President of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, for his perusal of this survey and the article 'Swamiji's Vision of the Ashrama at Mayavati and the Ashrama's Scenic Beauty', and for his offering many suggestions. He is also thankful to Revered Maharaj for his giving him a summary of the Mayavati Diary Entries (1949 to June 1998) prepared by Revered Swami Rudratmanandaji Maharaj. Diary Entries for the period from 1901 to 1963 were, however, read by the author himself, and used in these and other articles in this issue. Help received from a few members of the Advaita Ashrama brotherhood, who prefer anonymity, is also acknowledged. ❐

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Some Lectures Delivered by Dr. J.C. Bose at Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati

Nervous Impulses

Report of a lecture by DR. J.C. BOSE at the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati

In this article Dr. J.C. Bose, who often visited the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, and gave lectures while on such visits to this place much after his heart, provides a great insight: 'It lies with me, and me alone, to determine, whether the thing that was intended as a blow, shall not be to me the highest good. It is not what happens to us, but what we make of it, that is the crucial factor in our lives'. This is reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, *August 1911, p. 150.*

On the afternoon of 23 June [1911], the Mother [Mrs. Sevier] brought her guests up to the Ashrama, and there monks and visitors sat in a circle, to listen to a talk by Dr. J.C. Bose. It has become a custom with Dr. Bose, when visiting Mayavati, to give at least one lecture to the assembled monks, and on this, his third visit, the tradition was notably maintained.

Dr. Bose is the ideal teacher. Not only does he start always from the familiar, and make each point simple to demonstration, as he proceeds, but he appears unable to pass from one step of an argument to another, until definitely satisfied that all, even the lowliest of his hearers, understands.

On the present occasion, the lecture was on Nervous Impulses. The speaker began by pointing out that while we were all seated in a circle, round which would pulse the message that he would speak, there must be something between us to carry his thought. That something was the air. Without it, though he might speak, and we listen, there would be no sound. Thus we were dependent on three different things — a sound-producer, a sound-carrier and a sound-receiver. Passing to electrical systems, he made diagrams of batteries, or current-generators, with their wire conductors, leading to receivers, and he showed how the self-same current, pulsing along the wires, might be expressed in the receiver, as a sound — in a bell — as a flash of light — in a lamp — or as motion. In the needle-telegraph, which again was shown by diagram, we were made to understand how the needle was deflected to right or left, according as the wires brought *plus* or *minus* electricity to the receiver. Here it was clear that there must be two different kinds of impulse.

A man, similarly, from one point of view, was such a system. From his brain, white threads, or nerves, went out to all parts of the body, as conductors of impulses. Messages from the whole universe, falling upon these nerve-ends, were conveyed by them to the brain, there to awaken, perhaps sensation, perhaps a returning impulse. Sensations might be of light, of sound, of touch, or what not. From this point of view, the message sent inwards along the nerves was called *stimulus*, and the reply, whether the movement or sensation was called *response*. Strike, or prick, or burn the muscle of the arm for example, and immediately it responds, by thickening, shortening and contracting. It twitches up, and moves itself away from the source of stimulus. But here it is clear that two different

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kinds of impulse might be sent, for we can relax the arm by will, as well as contract it. Or we may see this duality of current in another way — as pleasure and pain. Let us stroke or tickle gently, and have we not a sensation of pleasure and relaxation? The kitten visibly swells under our caresses but let the same contact be multiplied in strength. We have now a blow, and we shrink from the pain. Thus with heat, with light, with almost every form of stimulus, the feeble application produces pleasure, the excessive, pain.

Here the lecturer passed on to the plant and showed that in the sensitive plant, *Mimosa*, we have something like a vegetable arm, which can be lowered and again raised, in response to stimulus. Then a few minutes were spent on one of Dr. Bose's own discoveries, and we examined the nerve-threads in ferns and cauliflower. Returning to the question of the animal nerve, and repeating the same statement as before, that the nerve, carrying messages of pleasure or pain, must have two different methods of expressing these — which for the sake of convenience, might be thought of as right-handed and left-handed molecular twists — it was clear that in a message of pain, there must also be the potentiality of the gentler pleasurable message, only marked, or overcome, by the volume of the painful. Dr. Bose then asked the question, *Have I anything within, by which to pre-determine the message that a nerve shall carry?* He showed how a slight pre-disposition, a slight 'tuning' on the part of the nerve itself, might be sufficient to convert a current of pain back as it were, into one of pleasure. Hence rising to the height of the argument, a man might live in the midst of suffering, and never know it. That which was within was everything. *'It lies with me, and me alone, to determine,' he ended, 'whether the thing that was intended as a blow, shall not be to me the highest good.' 'It is not what happens to us, but what we make of it, that is the crucial factor in our lives.'*

The little audience had listened breathless, to the gradual unfoldment of this significance of the subjective element in life, and one exclaimed, as we broke up, *'How wonderfully science can be spiritualised!'*

The vision of the snows, that had been in sight when we sat down, had faded, when we rose, and only the sombre shadows of the dusk were left. Nightfall was at hand, amidst the looming purple of the hills. For a few minutes we remained, in friendly chat, and then we parted, guests and hosts, thinking with sadness, of the longer parting, only a few days away, when the workers should have left us, to return to their work. [But then we may also say that there is happiness in recalling to our memory this grand meeting laden with great spiritual insight, can't we? It is up to us how we look at it!] ❐

Whether Plants Feel

The following report is taken from the recording in the Mayavati Diary.

Dr. Bose gave a very interesting lecture in the afternoon [of 8 June 1912] which lasted for three quarters of an hour from 3-50 P.M. All were present including Amritananda and Mohanlal. A light refreshment was a fitting termination to the entertaining discourse. They left in the evening.

The subject of the discourse was 'Whether Plants Feel' — if so, how long do they take to respond? What is the comparative sensitiveness of plants in relation to animals?

He [Dr. Bose] began by saying that a stimulus takes a certain time before it gets a

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response. This stimulus may be of different forms, e.g. it may be a sound stimulus, a light stimulus, an electric stimulus, and so forth. The feebler the stimulus, the greater time it takes to elicit the response. For instance, if I am called by a distant voice, I doubt whether I have been called or not, but in the case of a loud call, I at once jump up. But the difficulty is when the stimulus, the blow, is so strong as to make an instantaneous response, how to measure this infinitesimal time between the blow and its response?

By making use of the lever principle and using a very long index, 'the writer', it is practicable to magnify the record. One portion of the lever's arm is to be several times the other. Now, the apparatus which he [Dr. Bose] invented in the course of his laborious experiments was shown by a crude model, which Mr. Boshi [Sen] got ready for the occasion. It was a lever with its fulcrum very much on the side of the arm, and a long 'writer' attached to it. There was a writing pad which could be made to slide by its own weight just under the 'writer', which, if a pencil be attached to it, will draw a *line* on the pad. But he improved the stationary index [to obtain a series of dots instead] by one oscillating to and away from the pad [and impinging on the pad at regular intervals].

Those who know music know that by a long string a base sound is produced on the violin, but on shortening the string, a gradually higher and higher pitch [results]. That is to say, the vibrations become quicker in proportion to the shortness of the string. Now, by careful arrangement he found out a very thin metal index of a definite length which could be made to oscillate exactly ten times a second. Gradually he improved it to 100 times a second.

He further improved this by bringing to bear upon it another elastic metal index in the neighbourhood of this index, *exactly* tuned to it. By an electrical arrangement this 2nd piece may be oscillated exactly 100 times a second, and this will make the other vibrate *exactly* 100 times a second. One great gain of this oscillation of the index is that it minimizes friction. And instead of a line, a series of dots are placed in a *vertical* line on the sliding pad.

Now, by connecting a leaf of the plant to be experimented on to that end of the arm of the lever nearer the fulcrum, and making an arrangement for a complete electrical circuit, a shock can be given to the leaf at a particular moment. In the pad there is a very thin wire, and the arrangements are such that as it [the pad] slides down by its own weight on a button being pressed, only at one moment will this wire, coming nearest the other portion of the [electrical] arrangement, make the circuit closed, a shock will be given to the leaf, and if any response is given, the end of the arm connected with [the] leaf will move and at once the index will leave its vertical line of dots and inscribe a horizontal series on the pad [actually the dots will be at a resultant angle]. Now the moment of the shock can be determined — the pad going on sliding down — by the thin wire attached to the pad; and how long the plant took [to respond] can be ascertained by the number of the dots in the *vertical* line, and just where the vertical line gives place to the horizontal marks *when* the plant has responded. Now, as the index vibrates exactly 100 times a second, each dot means the lapse of $^{1}/_{100}$ times a second. If there be 6 such vertical dots, $^{6}/_{100}$ of a second must have elapsed between the shock and the response, in other words $^{6}/_{100}$ of a second is the 'response-time' of the plant under those definite conditions. That the *same* results are obtained time after time under similar conditions showed that this recording of the response-time was a scientific phenomenon.

Under varying conditions, the same plant has been observed to take different response-times, as for instance — less in heat and more in cold, less in summer than in winter, less in the morning than in the evening, and so forth. Also, different plants have different response-times.

He said that under the naive impression

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that plant life is lower than animal, he had tried 3 years in vain for satisfactory results, and after that he came by the remarkable result that the mimosa is ten times as quick as a frog in giving the response! In the cases of failure, the blow had been always too violent and the plants gave only one response and were killed.

He perfected his instrument so that even a thousandth of a second could be measured. And the plant recorded its own history, with all human intervention eliminated, unerringly, by the mere pressing of a button!

As he finished his lecture, he gave quite a spiritual turn to the whole discourse by adding that as it has always been the best endeavour of scientists to lessen material friction as far as possible to get the best results, so in human concerns also, we should try our best to minimize the human friction, which is Ignorance.

On being asked whether plants feel *pleasure* and *pain*, Dr. Bose said that he could give no definite answer, because it was extremely unsafe to go by human analogy. Only symptoms were what he could get. And the criterion of pleasurableness or painfulness is that in the former case we draw nearer the stimulus, and in the latter we go away from it.

Asked as to whether all matter responds, he said, yes, if the term 'response' be taken in a wide sense, to mean *some* kind of change!

The Underlying Unity of Life

Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, *July 1913, p. 132.*

Professor J.C. Bose, M.A., D.Sc., C.I.E., C.S.I., of the Presidency College, Calcutta, who is widely celebrated in scientific circles in Europe and America, as well as in his own land, was again a most welcome visitor at our Ashrama. He is always delighted to spend the summer holidays at our Ashrama because of the opportunity for solitude and complete retirement as well as for the calm and deep thinking it affords, and also because of the great beauty of the surrounding scene. And again, as the chief event of his stay, so far as the Mother [Sevier] and inmates of the Ashrama were concerned, was the lecture, which he has given each time of his visits, concerning the lines of his research.

This year, however, the lecture which has always been held in the Ashrama library, proved an even more interesting event than the previous lectures, considered both from the text of his subject and the number of hearers. As to the latter, the Mother had invited the European residents of the nearby station of Lohaghat, headed by Mr. R. Nestor, the Sub-divisional Officer, to attend the address; also the Tahsildar Sahib of Champawat had been invited. Thus, in all, there was a gathering of quite thirty persons, a considerable audience for a lecture in a monastery situated in the heart of the Himalayas and far distant from towns and railways.

The subject of Professor Bose's lecture was 'The Irritability of Plants'. For the occasion his assistant, Bosiswar Sen, B.Sc., had made, at his instructions, a sample of a recording instrument frequently used in the experiments at the Presidency College Laboratory. With this instrument, to which a plant had been attached, Professor Bose illustrated his ideas on plant response and the methods employed for making automatic records. It was the automatism of the plant in writing out its own history under the influence of various shocks and narcotics which proved of the greatest interest to the distinguished lecturer's audience. He pointed out, by drawings and lucid explanation, the astonishing fact that plants respond to external stimuli in

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much the same way that animals respond; in fact in some instances the response is even more complex and quicker in plants. Previously it had been supposed, so said Professor Bose, that the response of a plant was purely physical or hydro-mechanical. Through his successful investigations, however, he had been able to prove that the changes induced in a plant, through electric or other stimuli, were physiological, proving the existence of a nervous, living, sensitive apparatus in the structure of a plant. In making his experiments, Professor Bose said, it was necessary to invent an instrument that would record time to as infinitesimal a degree as a thousandth part of a second. He exhibited also the practical results of his new, demonstrated theories, how they would in time revolutionize practical botany. He also suggested how scientific discoveries proved, more and more as they were extended, the underlying unity of life, despite the multiplicity of living forms, and showed how science was in real consonance with the teachings of the Hindu philosophers that, 'From a multiverse we proceed to a uni-verse.'

The lecture proved most interesting, as may readily be imagined. The guests were entertained with light refreshments and in spite of a most rainy day and a journey of seven miles both in coming to and returning from Mayavati, the guests expressed their great interest and delight. Professor and Mrs. Bose remained in all about seven weeks at Mayavati, leaving this place on the twenty-third day of June [1913] to resume his interesting work in Calcutta. ❐

Sir J.C. Bose at Mayavati

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An Artist at the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati

Visit of Nandalal Bose to Advaita Ashrama

A Member, Advaita Ashrama

This article, as per Mayavati Diary Entry of 22 June 1942, was written by the 'President Swami [Revered Swami Pavitranandaji Maharaj] & Satya Krishna [Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj]'. It has been reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, *September 1942, pp. 433–5. The artist Nandalal Bose arrived on 18 June 1942 from Almora and left Mayavati (with his companions Vinayak Masoji and Shanti Dev Ghose) for Bagela on 23 June 1942.*

This summer, quite unexpectedly, we got a letter from a friend at Almora that Srijut Nandalal Bose, the famous artist and Director of the Kala Bhavan of Vishva-bharati, was desirous of visiting Mayavati — whether we could accommodate him for a short stay at our Ashrama. To accommodate Nandalal Babu? — by all means we will. We have heard so much about him. He is known as much as an artist as for his saintly character. It will be a nice thing to have him in our midst. We at once gave a reply to our friend to let us know the likely date of the arrival of Nandalal Babu at Mayavati.

One day as I was sitting at our portico, deeply absorbed in reading in the *Harijan* about Mahatma Gandhi's demand for the British withdrawal from India as also his earnestness to resist Japanese aggression, I saw that a man of dark complexion in pyjamas and having a piece of cloth like a towel hung round his neck was approaching the Ashrama. Usually we do not get any visitor at this time in our Ashrama. So I was wondering who that man might be — inwardly not feeling very happy that I was going to be disturbed in reading that very interesting subject. The man was slowly approaching me. To my great delight I found on his nearing me that he was Nandalal Babu. I heard that Nandalal Babu was very simple in his habit. But I could not imagine he was *so* simple! And with what devotion and love did he approach the Ashrama! One could visibly see that in his face. My annoyance at being disturbed in my reading was at once transformed into great joy and that to an infinite degree. As I welcomed Nandalal Babu — betraying my great emotion at his so unexpected a visit — in quiet but clear accents he said, 'I have come here as a pilgrim. This is a place of pilgrimage for me.' Nandalal Babu has great devotion for Swami Vivekananda. He has mixed very closely with some disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He received much help and encouragement from Sister Nivedita in his work as an artist. All these combined, created in him a great desire to see the Himalayan centre of the Ramakrishna Math, and in fulfilling that long-standing desire he defied his very old age. Indeed it was very bold for a man of his age to undertake such a difficult journey to Mayavati with many steep ascents and deep descents in the interior of the Himalayas and no city comforts on the way.

Nandalal Babu seemed to be a man of few words. He talked softly and not more than what was necessary. If asked any question he would give a very clear answer, to the entire satisfaction of the questioner, and then he would again be silent — absorbed in his own thoughts. It was not easy to draw him out. One feared that it would be disturbing him to ask a question.

One afternoon I promised to show him a good scenery and took him for a walk. We

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went to a place which overlooked the whole Ashrama and commanded a wide view of the Himalayan ranges — wave after wave, one behind another. The sun was setting and the crescent moon was just putting on a golden hue. We sat on a branch of a tree. Nandalal Babu seemed to like the spot.

'Are you doing some painting work here at Mayavati?' I asked him, thinking that in this surrounding an artist will find much inspiration for such works.

'No, I am not,' promptly he replied, to my utter surprise.

'An artist from America came here some years back. He made a lot of sketches at this place. As a matter of fact, he was always busy doing such works,' I rejoined.

'Yes, artists in Europe and America, or people who follow their method, generally do so. When attracted by a beautiful object or scenery,' Nandalal Babu observed, 'they try to copy it then and there. But there are people who will not do that. They will try to retain in memory what they see, and afterwards they will draw. It may be that their productions will be quite different from what they actually have seen. Nevertheless, the result may be very valuable.' He continued bringing to contrast the central feature of this method, 'Here is a leaf on this plant. One may draw a picture of this leaf looking at it. But one may meditate on this leaf, may feel by touch whether it is warm or cold, and then afterwards draw a picture. You will be surprised that in the latter case the result may be better.'

I was really surprised at this and asked what was the use of touching the leaf and feeling the degree of its warmth or coldness in order to draw it in picture.

Said Nandalal Babu: 'For identifying oneself with the subject. Unless one can fully identify oneself with the subject, one cannot produce the best result. If one meditates on the subject, one can visualize its setting much more clearly. If one looks at the subject and draws just from visual impression, the production will be a *mere copy* — a photograph. But if one follows the second method and looks at the subject not only with the physical eye but with the mental also, it will be a better work of art.

'So, I am trying to absorb something from the atmosphere. It may be, what I shall produce on going back to my school will have absolutely no connection with the scenery I have seen here, but nevertheless it will have sure influence on my future productions.'

I could not quite follow what he was saying and frankly asked him to make himself more explicit.

'By staying in this beautiful surrounding and seeing these sublime Himalayan landscapes, I may develop, for instance, a breadth of vision, my mind may be raised to a higher plane. As a result what I shall produce afterwards may be of a higher order.

'Indian art is idealistic. The Indians want to see the soul of a thing and give expression to that. If you can enter into the spirit of the Himalayas, you will have the contemplation of a grand sublimity. Afterwards if you draw the picture even of a human being, it will be very sublime. But artists in the West want to imitate. Either they try to copy the exact visual sight or they try to delineate in incoherent details some sort of "dream experience" based on recent theories of psycho-analysis. One way or the other, it is extremely realistic.... If the Western artists will draw the picture of a street, they will draw the picture of a street, a woman standing on a corner, a piece of newspaper on another corner, and so on. That is, they will jumble so many incoherent things together. If you ask them, what is the meaning of this?, they will say, this represents reality. Our present-day life is very much disturbed. This picture is the expression of our disturbed mind. But can't it be that when we shall see a thing, we shall see that only and not anything else? As for instance, the case of your meditation. When you meditate intensely, there is only one picture in your mind — other thoughts are kept away. But the Westerners generally have no conception of

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that....

'For an artist, real artistic sense and creative power are the most important things. Having them, he may learn and develop techniques throughout his whole life — it does not matter. But lacking the first requisites, one cannot produce any real work of art. Sometimes people give too much importance to technique in their overzeal to produce finished works.

'In idealistic art there is one danger. In the hands of incompetent persons it will degenerate into stiff symbolism. Nowadays in our country in the name of suggestive art people are producing things which can hardly be called works of art. For instance, pictures of gods and goddesses look flippant rather than sublime. They degrade rather than uplift the minds. Seeing this situation, some of us resolved, at one time, not to draw pictures of gods and goddesses.

'But at some period or other every artist should be inspired by great ideals such as those of gods and goddesses in our mythology — sublime aspects of nature such as find expression in Chinese landscape painting. That will automatically uplift one's mind and as a result one's productions will be turned to a higher level. That is very important. *Simply imitating nature is not art.* One must enter into the soul of nature and have a new vision which expressed in lines and colours becomes a work of art. For instance, the great Himalaya is transformed into an image of Dhyāni Buddha (Buddha in meditation) in the mind of an artist. The sublimity of the Himalayas is then transferred to the picture of Buddha. The sense of awe which you feel before the Himalayas, you experience at seeing the picture of Buddha.'

'Some hold the view,' I said, 'that the picture of Shiva with moon on the forehead appeared first before the mind of an artist, when he saw a crescent moon on the peak of a vast Himalayan range — looking absorbed in meditation.'

'Yes, that is what I too mean. Buddha and Shiva do not make much difference.'

'Now, if an artist works on this plan, the number of his productions will be only in proportion to the degree of inspiration he has received. As you say, there is a ratio between one's capacity to meditate and the amount of work one can do without undergoing spiritual deterioration. An artist may stop work for a very long time, because he has not the inspiration. And even on receiving inspiration he may have to nurture it for a long time before it is translated into a work of art. Till then, he must keep the secret. Otherwise the inspiration will be gone and he will lose the urge to work it out. As such, an artist ought to be a man of few words. He must be very taciturn, in order that he may absorb to his utmost the inspiration from his surroundings, or be in touch with the soul behind nature.'

Evening was advancing. We were in a spot not without the fear of wild animals. So we got up and quietly proceeded towards the Ashrama. ❐

The Philosophy of Art and the Faith of the Artist

What follows is taken from the Mayavati Diary entry of 20 June 1942. Artist Nandalal Bose, instead of giving a lecture, chose to answer questions. A meeting was therefore arranged at 3.30 p.m. in the Golkamra. Almost all attended the class, and as the reader can easily assess, were highly rewarded. All the questions and answers have been exquisitely compiled and recorded by Br. Satyakrishna [now Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj] into what rightly deserves to be called an article on 'The Philosophy of Art and the Faith of the Artist'.

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According to the artist, art is the expression of Ananda, joy mixed with bliss. There are different stages in the realization of art. The expression of the artist becomes more comprehensive, more living and more natural as the artist grows in the spirit of art more and more, enters deeper and deeper into his object, identifies more and more with his object. Finally, the artist is lost in his art and the expression conveys the whole of the thing expressed. It is usually found that sketches and pictures do not transmit the *personality* (as the artist would nomenclature it) of the object. It is so because the artist cannot enter into the subject [object] and cannot identify himself with the object.

Art is a positive science. It is not mere imagination — it is not mere pastime — fancy — it is not simply pleasure. Art is a creation. Three things are essential for the creation of art — namely, originality, nature and tradition. Art is dead without any of them. Art develops properly when all these three combine and harmonize into an organic whole. There is an unconscious mathematics of art. The proportions and balance of a sketch testify to the mathematics of the artist. Of course, the very thought of learning α & β will be repulsive to him.

Ethics and community very often challenge art. Should art be divorced from morality? Is art for art's sake? There is no question of good and bad, moral and immoral in art. To an artist there is the same joy in a dry leaf, in a decaying rose, in a dying man, in dreadful desert, as in a green life, in a budding rose, in a smiling youth and in a murmuring rivulet and laughing lands. The artist finds the same *rasa* everywhere. He has a different eye to look, a creative heart & mind to watch. Where ordinary man finds things ordinary or rather obnoxious, the artist stands still and is lost in a mysterious joy. He finds divine rhythm and beauty everywhere. To him nothing is known as good and bad, moral and immoral. What he sees, he sees as beauty and joy. The artists have their being in a plane where petty weaknesses of man cannot enter. An analogy may be put here to illustrate the standpoint of the artist. Just as God has created this universe where there are good and evil, joy and sorrow, light and darkness, and yet, in spite of these contradictory and conflicting things God enjoys His *līlā* — mysterious — play and is detached from these, so also an ideal artist creates so many things which may appear differently to different persons but at the same time to the artist they give a joy ineffable. The artist is a *witness* of his creation — he enjoys but does not attach himself. It is not art that pollutes the morals of man. It is not the real artist that vitiates the pristine purity of man. It is art that opens a new vision for man. It is art that elevates human mind — nay, art gives man an upward push and kindles the divine light in man. Art that does not flood man with a celestial light, that does not make man noble and sublime, that does not spiritualize man is not art in the true sense of the term. The so-called art is a mere pastime of an idle worker.

A true artist believes that the God of religion — the One Existence-Knowledge-Bliss is attainable in and through art too. As soon as this faith goes away, no sincere artist can any more confine himself to a mere painting of colour. To an ideal artist, the image of Buddha and a blade of grass are of equal worth. They are not equal because of their external beauty. The artist strives to find the intrinsic unity underlying the varied objects of nature. He too attempts to find the *caitanya-ānanda-sat* underlying all these manifest objects. There are philosophers who told that thinking ripens into philosophy, philosophy consummates into poetry and there are artists who believe that art culminates into the highest realization of man — which is the goal of religion. Art and religion are not two things poles asunder. They are sister virtues of man. Art endeavours to grasp the *satyam-śivam-sundaram* which is also the aim of religion. ❑

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Prabuddha Bharata, May 1900, pp. 75–7.

Overheard in a Garden: An Allegory

ADVAITIN*

To me the meanest flower that
blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie
too deep for tears.
— *Wordsworth*

In the enchanting part of the world, the Himalayas, one lovely day in early summer, I was sitting in my garden, where numerous flowers bloomed.

Long, long ago, many delightful stories were told of certain godly men, who lived in the recesses of these mountains, dwelling on high thoughts, possessing all the secrets of nature, and never growing old or weary. Surely, my mind must have been pondering on these legends upon this particular occasion, for what with the soul-soothing effect of the gentle air wafted from the snowy summits, and the delicate perfumes floating around me, I seemed to become one with the spirit of nature, and a strange thing happened to me, for I became conversant of a discussion the flowers were carrying on in warm and fragrant breaths.

The subject of their conversation was sun-worship, and which of their community worshipped in the best manner. An anemone was the first to express an opinion, — she peeped forth, and in a low voice was heard to say, that in her humble way she paid due homage to the sun, but she found him partial in his favours, showing himself more to other flowers than to herself. Her companions stated that this was not true, for it was well known that the anemone was not anxious for more light, preferring her own obscurity and shade.

The portulaca, a plant of creeping habit, growing close to the ground, and surrounded by weeds, was the next to state her views. 'My way is good,' she declared, 'I have a liking for the earth, because he supplies my requirements, and I have many admirers: I do not often look at the sun, for he is so powerful and searching in his rays.'

Climbing over a trellis nearby, was a honey-suckle who, shaking with laughter, interrupted her. 'Why,' said he, 'that is a very poor way, and as for your admirers, they are only dull little weeds, who know nothing. Now, notice how gracefully I extend my arms in worship, bearing a profusion of sweet flowers, thus attracting from far and near, innumerable bees who come to extract my wisdom.' Before the portulaca could reply, a stiff, showy sun-flower of rich yellow colour, with a staring black eye, remarked — '*I* consider the honey-suckle as foolish as the portulaca, for how can a creeper that is so weak as to require support himself, — for was he not depending on the trellis? — talk about knowing the proper means of worshipping the sun: moreover, his boast about the bees was absurd, for they only clustered round him, not to learn, but to satisfy their own needs. Assuredly,' he added grandly, '*I* may be proud of my erect attitude, and golden head, which I always keep turned towards the sun.' It was now the rose's opportunity to put in a word. 'That is undoubtedly a good plan for you, who cannot act otherwise,' she complacently responded, 'but not to be compared to the style in which I pay my devotions. *I* offer a faultless form of magnificent colour, united with a lovely fragrance, which makes me a fitting recipient for the sun's condescension.'

* Mrs. Sevier.

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Attention was now directed to a pompous voice coming from the direction of the hedge, where lay an old oak stump, around whose rugged back a spray of ivy twined. In a deliberate fashion the ivy addressed his companions: 'Observe, dear friends, my secure position; I cling to the old habits, as my ancestors have done before me, and prefer following our original modes of worship, gathered from my old associate on whose heart I recline.'

At this avowal, a chorus of dissent followed, and many voices exclaimed, 'Why, do you not know that your so-called guide is corrupt throughout, and nothing but a worthless old trunk: in former times he may have assisted your family in their growth, but those days have passed long since, and if it were not for your persistent blindness, you would have discovered it ere now.' The disconcerted ivy was about to protest against these severe comments, when a strong young sapling growing at his side, gently bent down, and whispered him not to be discouraged but to look higher, and renounce his obsolete ideas; at the same time extending an overhanging branch to him, which after a moment's hesitation, the ivy gratefully embraced, and was thus raised from his lowly position. A low murmuring was heard in a quiet nook of the garden, which I noticed proceeded from a bed of tall lilies, distinguished by their beautiful white flowers, and extremely graceful appearance, being elegantly borne on slender stalks which were artificially supported. 'Here,' they whispered in unison, 'do we worship devoutly and well, for note how secluded we are, and of what modest appearance, notwithstanding our incomparable scent and purity.' To this some groups of convolvuli, which had entwined themselves about the adjoining plants, objected, — 'for' continued they, 'if you were in a more exposed situation, and your props removed, there is no saying, but at the first gush of wind or shower of rain, you might be laid low in the mire. Consider, how liberal *we* are in our devotion — *we* embrace all our acquaintances and permit them to learn of us.' This conceited utterance was more than the monkshoods could allow, so they hastened to assure the convolvuli that they were greatly mistaken in their contention, for instead of advancing the interests of their hapless neighbours, they were retarding their progress, for how could they feel the sun's warmth and see his light, when crushed to earth and smothered in the cumbrous clasp of the convolvuli! Thus rebuked, the creepers made no reply, but I observed that several of the blossoms closed their eyes, and pretended to be meditating. The monkshoods admitted the lilies were a little too self-conscious, but their devotion was very sweet and becoming. However, they laid claim that their own brotherhood was the perfect way, though they could not allow that all the other flowers were sufficiently advanced to follow their methods, even if they desired to do so, — for the majority of the dwellers in the garden were still dazzled by the beauties and vanities of fine colour, luxuriant growth and exquisite perfume, thereby, diverting their attention from the direct sunlight. At this point in the controversy, the evening primrose in grave accents, denied the existence of the sun, but no one took any notice of this assertion, for all the plants knew that the speaker never opened his flowers until after sunset, so his opinion was worthless. Now the centre of the garden was occupied by a stately old deodar, who had lived there for ages, and adored the sun in the truest manner, by simply keeping his head raised to the skies and contemplating the shining countenance of his Divinity, until he perceived the Sun of Knowledge penetrating all things and discerned that where he shone all was brightness and happiness. He now sighed profoundly and stirred his branches in warning notes, much to the perturbation of the argumentative flowers growing at his feet, for they deeply revered the mighty monarch who towered over them in his patriarchal beauty and strength. In im-

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pressive tones, he thus addressed them:— 'My foolish children, why these hasty words and self-conscious remarks? You have been running wild over this discussion! Listen to me. We *all* derive our life, beauty and colour from the sun, *he* causing the variety in expression and growth, and by whatever means we turn to him, he accepts our devotion, as coming from parts of his own manifestation. Only feelings of loving kindness and harmony must reign in our midst, and by adopting this course and maintaining an equable disposition, we shall form an harmonious whole. How would the master like it, if but *one* kind of flower grew in his garden? — He admires the scent of this, the beauty of that, and so forth: thus, in our several ways, we may rest satisfied in contributing to his pleasure.' As the grand old tree ceased his admonitions, a gentle zephyr sprang up, soothing the discomforted flowers, and allaying the irritation caused by the foregoing dispute, at the same instant, sweeping the heart-strings of the noble deodar, who readily responded, expressing in delightful cadences the joys of peace and concord. Suddenly the whole garden broke forth into a hymn of praise to the glorious sun, and in one loving spirit the flowers gracefully bowed their heads to show their gratitude for his protecting care: the bees flitting from blossom to blossom, ceased to sip their nectar, swelling the songs of thanksgiving with a low appreciative hum, while the birds paused in their airy flight to blend their sweet and tender notes in the ravishing strain, the radiant sun at the same time graciously smiling his acceptance of this adoration, and glancing his shining rays into the very heart of his happy worshippers, bringing bliss and pure delight to that happy little assembly. Such a symphony I never heard — it was beautiful, *so* beautiful, and its essence stole softly into my inmost being. Thus sweet peace was restored in the garden and rested over all. I was awakened from my reverie by the bells of the neighbouring monastery pealing forth their sonorous chimes, and it was borne in upon me, that I had comprehended the secrets of nature, and communed with the spirit of life. The mystic psalmody still vibrated through and through me in silent rhythm as I reluctantly rose from my seat and turned my steps homewards. ❐

Mother Sevier with Glama

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A Sapphire

SWAMI SATYAPRIYANANDA

We present below the story behind the locket of which Josephine MacLeod was very fond. Clearly brought out in this narration is Miss MacLeod's love for India and France (indeed, it symbolized the universal love awakened in her by Swami Vivekananda), which was rewarded by soul-touching sacrifices on the part of an unknown Indian youth who offered to her the Nīlkānta *sapphire — all that he possessed, and a leading French sculptor who with that sapphire fashioned a locket absolutely free of cost! The narration also highlights her losing this treasure at Mayavati, her own expression of having lost her all, and the true Indian's spirit brought out in the words of a hillside coolie of Mayavati, who came across it a few months later: 'Am I to understand that one who looks for a lost article, finds it out and hands it over to its rightful owner should accept money as reward?'*

At Mayavati

In remembrance of Swami Vivekananda, Josephine MacLeod [hereafter Joe] kept several mementos near by. Joe's most prized possessions, aside from Swamiji's lock of hair, were several letters he had written to her. The letters reminded her of Swamiji and also served to introduce strangers in a tangible, direct way to Swamiji and the Vedanta philosophy. At Ridgely Manor, she nailed a large, colour poster of him to the back of the chair in which he used to sit. At Stratford, in her room, his features were fashioned in alabaster on the wall. She often kept around her numerous collections of his works, and always carried with her a small crystal sculpture of Swamiji made by the French artist Lalique. Lalique also designed the pendant she wore around her neck day and night. One never saw Joe without this pendant. The story that surrounds this pendant is a fascinating one which Sri Shankari Prasad Basu had heard from Revered Swami Abhayanandaji Maharaj [familiarly known as Bharat Maharaj]. He had narrated the incident while he was staying at Belur Math.

Maharaj was then a worker at the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati. Miss MacLeod, whom Maharaj used to call Tantine, too was there. One day*, as one in a frenzy, she came to Maharaj taking quick strides and told him: 'Bharat! Bharat! I am done. I have lost my locket. That contained the locks of Swamiji. What shall I do, Bharat? I must have that locket at all costs. By whatever means it be, please search it out.'

Bharat Maharaj saw that the grand old lady was thoroughly shaken and in tears. After quieting her with many words of consolation, all present in the Advaita Ashrama started to look for the locket$. But no trace of it could be found. The old lady surmised that someone had stolen it. She informed the police officials at all levels, from the lowest to the highest. She had good contacts with the higher officials in the police department. That

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* As per Mayavati Diary Entry of 25 October 1926, Miss MacLeod arrived at Mayavati that day and was received at the dispensary by the inmates. 'She was all comfortable throughout her journey, but to much regret, she had lost her jewel....' Miss MacLeod 'spoke on Swamiji for an hour', vide Mayavati Diary Entry of 27 October 1926, and left Mayavati on 28 October with a heavy heart, vide Mayavati Diary of date. The jewel (locket) was later discovered by Joydev 'while returning from the jungle' (vide Mayavati Diary Entry dated 8 December 1926).

$ In fact a telegram was sent to Bashi [Mr. Boshi Sen], vide Mayavati Diary Entry of 26 October 1926 'to enquire about & send searchers for the jewel lost by Tantine'.

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apart, the British ruled the country and she was a western lady. Naturally, there was much commotion.

Sensing the turn it was taking, Bharat Maharaj admonished her in strong words: 'Tantine, what is this that you are doing? True, you have lost that which is very dear to you. For that reason would you go to the extent of troubling all these poor hill people? They are innocent, simple. The police would for no fault of theirs give them great trouble.'

Miss MacLeod understood the situation. Holding Bharat Maharaj's hands in her own, she said in a plaintive voice: 'Bharat, that thing is my all in all. If indeed anyone can now get back that thing so very dear to me, that certainly is you alone. Please search diligently for it.'

Swimming in tears the old lady returned to Belur Math. Bharat Maharaj tried hard but could not get any clue.

A few months later, a hillside coolie [Joydev], who was then working at the Advaita Ashrama, came one day with a necklace-like object hanging from his hand. He said, 'Maharaj, this lay on the road-side. Please see whether this belongs to anyone here.'

Maharaj's face did not hide the joy when he saw the necklace and he said, 'This is the lost locket of Tantine!' 'How did you get it?' enquired he. The coolie replied, 'As I was coming along, I saw something glittering. The rest of it was covered under leaves and earth. Clearing the earth, I picked it up.'

Maharaj immediately understood that when Miss MacLeod was on her walk, the locket had come off and fallen among the leaves and creepers. Later, it became covered by dust. As it had rained, the mud had cleared and the coolie could sight it.

Immediately Maharaj sent a telegram conveying to Miss MacLeod the good news. In reply Joe sent a telegram expressing her gratefulness and requesting that the finder be given Rs. 200/-.

Bharat Maharaj sent for the coolie and said, 'The western lady, pleased with you, has asked that you be given Rs. 200/-. Here, take it.' The coolie asked, 'Why should I take it?' Maharaj said, 'You have found out the lady's much-desired thing and given it to her, so she gives you *bakshis*.' The coolie replied, 'I came across it and so I brought it to you. Why should I accept money for that? Am I to understand that one who looks for a lost article, finds it out and hands it over to its rightful owner should accept money as reward?' Maharaj continued, 'The old lady gives this money out of love; why won't you take it?' The coolie responded, 'No! I shall not take it.' After much pleading and repeated requests, the coolie finally agreed to take Rs. 22/- which amount he owed in respect of payment for his land or house.

Previous History Regarding the Sapphire and the Locket

This locket was not merely an ornament. It has a history which is pregnant with a deep meaning and a lofty attitude. Her nephew, Frances Leggett, hearing from Miss MacLeod, narrates the incident as follows:

The incident occurred during Swamiji's time. Miss MacLeod was then at Bombay. One day, two young men came to see her. One of them wore a wrist watch to the chain of which was attached a large *Nīlkānta* sapphire. Miss MacLeod said appreciatively, 'What a beautiful colour!' The youth immediately responded by saying, 'Please take it. It is yours!' Miss MacLeod was embarrassed and said, 'Why should I take it? No, no, certainly I won't take it.' The next day, that young man came alone and vehemently told her, 'You must certainly take this.' Miss MacLeod too stuck to her earlier stand of not taking it, and said, 'What do you say! How shall I take such a costly thing just like that? Why should I take it, tell me.' The man said, 'You love our countrymen; so this I offer to you with gratitude. Won't you please take it?' Miss MacLeod accepted it for the spirit behind his giving. The next day, the other friend came, and he asked, 'Do you know, that what my friend gave to you was all the treasure he possessed?' Miss

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MacLeod did not come across either of the two friends thereafter.

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Seven years after this memorable incident, Miss MacLeod met Monsieur Lalique in New York. At that time Lalique was famous both in France and Europe as a sculptor and sapphire fashioner. His name was mentioned in bold letters amongst the world-renowned sculptors of the time. Showing to Lalique the sapphire in her possession, Miss MacLeod narrated the startling history behind her getting possession of it. She thereafter requested him to fashion for her a reliquary (to be used as a repository for a saint's mortal remains or some belonging). Monsieur Lalique received the sapphire and mounted it on a locket in a year's time.

It was a wonderful creation. It looked as if it were the universal heart: Two angels pictured on light blue glass; their boned wings were translucent; stationed upside down above the clouds on the memento, they were holding in their hands the *Nilkanta* sapphire. Simply marvellous!

Miss MacLeod was overjoyed to receive the locket. Again and again she expressed her gratitude to Lalique, and asked, 'Monsieur Lalique, how much should I pay you as charges for fashioning the locket?' Monsieur Lalique replied, 'You do not have to pay anything. It is my gift to you.' Miss MacLeod, taken aback, asked, 'Gift! Why, for what reason?' Monsieur Lalique replied calmly, 'Because you love our countrymen, the French, so much!'

Thus, three people of Asia, America and Europe came together in a common bond of love centering on one sapphire! — an unknown youth of India, Miss MacLeod of America, and Monsieur Lalique of France.

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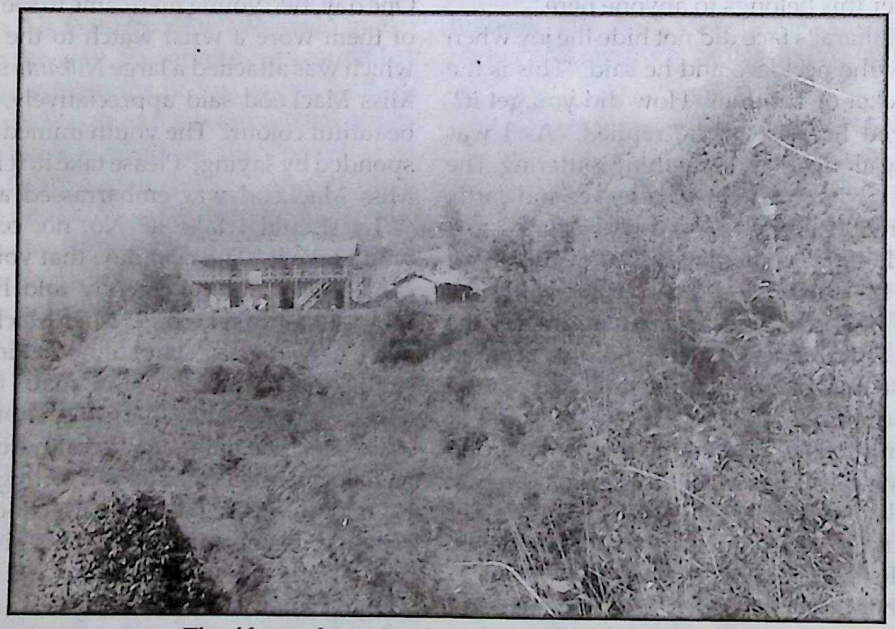
2. *Vedanta Kesari*, July 1989, pp. 264–9; see p. 267 for the narration by Frances Leggett in *Late and Soon*, p. 243.



The old guest house (Mother Sevier's summer residence)

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Mayavati, the Home of *Prabuddha Bharata*

SWAMI MADHAVANANDA

Regarding Revered Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj's writings it is said: 'There was nothing in them that need not have been said just as there was nothing that needed to be said but was not there.' It is this feature of his writings that prompts us to reprint this article which first appeared in the Prabuddha Bharata's *Golden Jubilee Number 1945 and was reprinted in the Prabuddha Bharata's Centenary Special Number, January 1995. Revered Maharaj was the fourth President of Advaita Ashrama, and the ninth President of the Ramakrishna Order.*

...During the long period of fifty years, the life-current of *Prabuddha Bharata* has not flowed in a uniformly even stream; there have been ebbs and flows. Started at Madras [in 1896] under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda, shortly after his unprecedented success at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, U.S.A., in 1893, it ceased to appear for a time in 1898, on the untimely death of its gifted editor, Mr. Rajam Iyer. But it soon re-emerged, gathering fresh momentum, as it were, at Almora, under the able editorship of Swami Swarupananda. When Captain and Mrs. Sevier, ardent English disciples of Swami Vivekananda, founded the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati, fifty miles east of Almora, in 1899, *Prabuddha Bharata* was transferred there. From that time on, Mayavati has remained its home, although it is printed and published from Calcutta since 1924. For the last fifty years it has been carrying from door to door the eternal, life-giving message of Vedanta, the universal message of the oneness of existence and the divinity of man, so eloquently preached by Swami Vivekananda. His benediction on the journal is to be seen in his poem 'To the Awakened India' (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 4, p. 322). The progress it has made in its Himalayan home amply justifies the Swami's high hopes about its mission. The torch of illumination it has borne all these years burns in undimmed lustre and guides countless pilgrims on the path of Truth. *Prabuddha Bharata* has long been considered to be one of the best cultural magazines not only in India but in the outside world as well. Its lofty vision of mankind as one Brotherhood united in bonds of love is a potent force for universal uplift — 'the regeneration of man the brute into man the god.' As years roll on, its beneficent influence will be felt more and more throughout the civilized world.

It has had notable contributors, including Swami Vivekananda himself, whose memorable visit to Mayavati in January 1901, was a great impetus to the band of selfless monks who were untiringly nursing the magazine in those early days. Sister Nivedita was a regular contributor, and wrote, besides other valuable articles the Occasional Notes since the premature death of Swami Swarupananda in 1906 till her own untimely death in 1911. One also recalls the name of Frank J. Alexander, a brilliant young American, whose facile pen and remarkable insight into Indian philosophy and culture enriched its pages with fascinating articles, sometimes anonymously or under assumed names such as 'Monk Tej Narayan'. It was he who, during his stay at Mayavati in 1911 and subsequent years, helped in writing *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, published in four volumes by the Advaita Ashrama. The premature passing away in America of this radiant soul, full of love and admiration for India, was a sad loss

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to India and the world. Another editor who made noteworthy contributions to the magazine was Swami Prajnananda, whose untimely death in 1918 robbed the Organization of a deep thinker, a powerful writer, and an accomplished worker. Among other talented editors whose writings have done much to raise the magazine in the estimation of the cultured public, I can mention [Swami Ashokananda] the present Head of the Vedanta Societies at San Francisco and Berkeley, in U.S.A. Since his time the journal has appreciably gained in size as well as in quality, and has drawn an increasing number of important contributors both from India and abroad.

Prabuddha Bharata has always taken a keen interest in the humanitarian activities of the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Swarupananda organized the Kishengarh Famine Relief in 1899, and the Dharmasala Earthquake Relief in 1905. He also actively helped the Kankhal Sevashrama in its early days. Reports of different types of permanent and temporary work and appeals for them have always found a place in the magazine. One such appeal in aid of Famine Relief inspired an eminent subscriber, Mr. S.N. Pandit, Bar-at-Law, Rajkot, to take a vow, in 1915, that he would not touch food till he had collected Rs. 10,000 for the work. He succeeded in it, and forthwith sent a cheque for the amount to the Manager, *Prabuddha Bharata*.

Even in 1910, when I went to Mayavati for the first time, I was struck by the extraordinarily simple conditions in which the publication department of the Ashrama was conducted. A double crown hand press was turning out not only *Prabuddha Bharata* but also *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. A new Brahmacharin from Southern India was composing the fifth volume of the *Complete Works*, while the magazine had a salaried compositor, who could speak Bengali, and for his urbane manners was treated more as an Ashramite than as an outsider. The press also dealt with reprints from both the magazine and the *Complete Works* often in a different format. The printing and book-binding staff were all people from the neighbouring villages. No wonder that the get-up of the publications was not at all up to the mark. The monastic workers were few. In fact, in more than one winter, when there was usually more work, there were only three, who divided among themselves the entire work of the Ashrama.

Mayavati, being situated deep in the Himalayan forests, 37 (then 60) miles from the nearest railway station, is an ideal place for leading a contemplative life. There being only a bridle path, it is not very easily accessible. Being about 6,800 feet above the sea-level, it is delightful in summer, when the plains of Northern India are like a furnace. The spring and autumn are also charming. The monsoon is generally heavy, and the winter is cold. But the luxuriant vegetation and the rush of torrents are a feast to the eye and the ear in the rainy season, and in the winter the exquisite beauty of snow-falls, which turns the whole place into a fairyland, more than compensates any discomforts caused. The most elevating sight, however, is the magnificent snow-range extending for over 200 miles from Badrinarayan in the west to Panchachuli in the east, with Nanda Devi (25,661 ft.) and Trisul in the middle. Nearly 70 miles off as the crow flies, it is visible on most days of the year, and with its play of colours, particularly at sunrise and sunset, it never fails to inspire and thrill everybody's heart. Its silvery dazzle in moonlight is also enchanting; it at once reminds one of Shiva's form, as set forth in the 'meditation' prescribed for that form of God.

The silence of Mayavati is a thing that needs to be felt to appreciate it. The monastery is the only settlement on the hill, the nearest village being one and a half miles off. Lohaghat, the sub-divisional town, is 3½ miles and Champavat, the Tehsil, is 4½ miles from Mayavati, which is about a thousand feet higher than these. The trade route from Tanakpur (O. & T. Ry.) to Tibet passes through these. Since only ordinary necessar-

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ies of life can be had at Lohaghat, many things have to be brought from the plains and stocked for the year. Captain Sevier's idea of having a place free from frequent intrusion from the public has been fully realized at Mayavati. But the disadvantages of carrying on any kind of work, especially publication work, from such a place are obvious. The difficulties have to some extent been obviated by transferring first the book department and then the magazine to Calcutta. The additional expenditure consequent on the maintenance of two establishments has been offset by the fine get-up and larger circulation of the publications, which would have been impossible at Mayavati.

The Mayavati Ashrama has always sought to combine plain living with high thinking. Along with work, there is enough scope in it for study, meditation, and recreation. A good library and a large number of periodicals supply sufficient food for thought. In the early days, there were three buildings of stone with slated roofs, at different levels, within two minutes' walk of each other. The uppermost one was (and still is) the main Ashrama, where all the monks lived in cubicles on the first floor, which also contained the editor's humble office. A hall on the ground floor, with an open fire-place, fed by logs, served as the sitting and dining room, office, and library. In another hall on the same floor were the printing and book-binding paraphernalia. A single almirah of medicines etc. in the passage between the two halls was the dispensary, which was run by one of the Swamis. On account of this congestion, a small meditation cabin has been built at a short distance from the main Ashrama, secluded by trees, which was much resorted to by the Swamis in the early days, and latterly on occasions. The other two buildings were the winter and summer residence of Mrs. Sevier, and the guests' quarters. A small building for the dispensary with six beds, and a very much larger building for the publication department were constructed in 1914. Since then the editors' quarters have been in this latter building, which also contains the post office, opened in 1919 — the telegraph office being at Lohaghat; formerly it was at Almora. Subsequently, a fine building has been constructed for the hospital, which, with its much larger number of beds, under the charge of a qualified doctor, is a boon to the sick for many miles around. The Ashrama has some outhouses, a kitchen garden and some flower gardens and orchards. It has a number of cattle, but of poor breed. Up to 1918 it had a horse too. The Ashrama has got extensive lands. At one time it had a small tea plantation.

Captain and Mrs. Sevier, or 'Mother' as she was generally called on account of Swami Vivekananda's so addressing her, came to India along with the Swami in 1897, and after accompanying him to various places, settled at Mayavati in 1899. The Captain was Manager of *Prabuddha Bharata* till his death in 1900. His body was cremated by the monks with Hindu rites on the rivulet that flows below Mayavati. It was to comfort Mrs. Sevier that Swami Vivekananda, accompanied by Swami Shivananda, paid the visit to Mayavati, to which reference has already been made. Mrs. Sevier was a jewel of a lady, of *Advaitic* views, and was truly a mother, full of loving kindness for everybody, so much so that the hill people used to speak of her as an 'angel'. Every one of the Ashrama inmates had a taste of her motherly love. We used to take the afternoon tea with her by turns, after which she would come up to the Ashrama for a game of croquet. Despite her age, she was of active habits, and helped in the editing of the Ashrama publications, occasionally also contributing articles to the magazine, signed 'C.E.S.', etc. At her invitation Dr. (afterwards Sir) J.C. Bose and Mrs. (now Lady) Bose, whom she addressed as 'Shakuntala', visited Mayavati on several occasions during summer, together with Sister Nivedita and Sister Christine. A solitary path has been named 'Bose's Walk', because he used to walk there,

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just as the path immediately below the Ashrama has been named 'Monk's Walk' after Swami Vivekananda. When such parties came, badminton was an alternative game. Latterly it and volley ball have replaced croquet. During one of his visits, Dr. Bose gave us a talk on his favourite subject, the response of plants to stimuli, demonstrating it, as far as possible in such circumstances with the mimosa (vide *Prabuddha Bharata*, August 1911, p. 150). Earlier, Mr. A.M. Bose, the patriot, had also been a guest at Mayavati. After Mrs. Sevier had left for England in 1916, Mr. C.R. Das with family was similarly a guest of the Ashrama.

There were other types of guests also. One of these was a doctor who at one time was the Port Health Officer at Rangoon. He was an amicable person, of a devotional turn of mind, which made him give up his service and live with the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. Latterly, during his state of convalescence from an illness, he would sit in a chair in the upper verandah and make any servant who passed by do some job for him. We used to ridicule him for this weakness. One day, when he was bringing his clothes for the laundryman, from the head of the stairs he saw a servant and asked him to take the clothes down. I happened to be there by accident and remarked, 'Just in time!' The doctor laughed and went towards his room. But he returned in a minute and said to me, 'Swami, which was just in time? My finding the boy, or your being there to see it!'

Mayavati has off and on had a number of distinguished visitors also, including high Government officials. Once two pilgrims, on their way back from Kailas, halted for a day at Mayavati. One of them was a writer and the other an artist of repute. The former regaled the Swamis with tales of his adventures in Tibet. He said that at one place he thrust his stick into a cleft in the ground, and it struck a vein of gold! But his ingenuity in ousting a gang of robbers was more interesting. When faced with them, he said, he took out from his pocket his spectacles case, and holding it erect before them, told them firmly that if they advanced a step further, they would die! At this they got frightened and went away. His companion, however, whispered to the listeners that it was all a yarn — which they already knew.

External worship is banned at Mayavati, only the ceremony connected with taking the monastic vow being permissible. The inmates are at liberty, however, to tell the beads in private, and they chant, recite, or sing on holy occasions. On the *Shivaratri* day they fast and keep vigil at night, although the nights are long in winter. The lovely autumnal atmosphere during the *Dussera* festival, with hundreds of pink, yellow, and white cosmos flowers dancing in the breeze, automatically suggests to the mind that the Divine Mother, on Her journey to the plains from Her home at Mt. Kailas, has passed through the Ashrama. Occasional trips to near-by places where there are temples, mostly dedicated to Shiva, are also undertaken. Swami Saradananda who visited Mayavati in 1906, introduced the recitation at meal time of that well-known verse of the Gita (4.24) in which everything connected with a sacrifice is described as Brahman or God Himself.

Regular scriptural classes are held at Mayavati for the inmates. When I was there, the main class used to be in the afternoon. Sometimes, when a specially qualified monk, like Swami Shuddhananda, was present, the class would be very interesting. Often there would be another class at night, in which readings from some devotional book like the *Bhagavata* would take place. Once a weekly session of lectures was organized, in which the Swamis by turns had to speak on some prescribed subject. Although it was started more as a pastime, it developed the power of extempore speaking in the inmates, which some of them afterwards turned to good account. Swami Shuddhananda presided over these meetings, and always gave us illuminating presidential addresses.

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For a short time we conducted a small school for a number of boys who came from Pithoragarh, a sub-divisional town 30 miles above Mayavati. It arose out of our desire to engage one of the Swamis who wanted to run a school at Lohaghat. Even the most indolent among us took part in teaching the boys. After the school went on for some time, there was a severe snow-fall, and the boys, unable to stand the cold, took French leave, bringing our enthusiastic endeavours to an abrupt stop. But one of the boys has immortalized himself to us by a wonderful discovery of his: On seeing a dismounted form of *Prabuddha Bharata* laid on the ground for washing, he scanned the matter for some minutes with rapt attention and then exclaimed, 'It is all a, b, c, d ... a, b, c, d!'

The daily menu at Mayavati did not admit of much variation. This deficiency was made up by occasional *bhandaras* or feasts. Before the War, the spending of such a small sum as two rupees extra would provide for a few dainties. Milk and its products being cheap, it was easy to prepare delicious dishes out of them, and some of the monks were expert cooks. In this connection an amusing incident comes to my mind. A Parsi gentleman, living at Mayavati to test his fitness for future monastic life, was entrusted with the task of making an index to Swami Vivekananda's *Complete Works*. When, in the course of his work, he came to the episode of King Yudhishthira refusing to go to heaven without the dog which was accompanying him in his last journey, he was so struck with it that he said, 'I shall give two rupees for a *bhandara* in honour of Yudhishthira and his dog.' He was told in fun that if he wanted to include the dog, he must double the amount!

On another occasion, we had as guest a young American writer who came to Mayavati with a view to leading a severely simple life. When, in answer to his query about the charge, he was told that he might pay twelve rupees a month, he exclaimed, 'It is ridiculous!' Dressed in half-size dhoti, he would sun himself on a bench with a bare body, and outbid us in his eagerness to get as far away from the civilized mode of life as possible. One of his self-imposed restraints was on writing. One day, when he failed to control himself in this, he was penitent and offered two rupees for a *bhandara* as an expiation! Some years later, this gentleman kindly looked me up after a service at San Francisco. Evidently the memories of Mayavati had not been lost upon him.

From the early days the Mayavati Ashrama has devised a very convenient type of dining table, which is a compromise between the oriental and occidental modes of eating. In India one eats from a plate placed directly on the floor. This has a twofold drawback. In the first place, dust is very easily blown into the plate, and secondly, one has to maintain a stooping posture while eating. At Mayavati, a low rectangular table, about fourteen inches in height and covered with oilcloth, is used, on which the plates are put, and the persons eating also sit on low seats, about three inches high. Obviously, this simple arrangement is advantageous from various standpoints. When there are many persons, two such tables are placed end to end.

For the Ashrama servants there used to be two *bhandaras* every year. One of these was on Swami Vivekananda's birthday, which fell in the thick of winter. Since it is the custom among hill people to eat dressed only in dhoti, half their gusto was gone in fighting the cold, for the feast took place in the evening, and the little piles of live charcoal placed near them did not suffice. The feast was followed by music, in which the sweeper, who had the bearing of a gentleman, was given a leading role because of his skill in it, and the cobbler entertained the audience with a bear dance! The 'funny little barber', as Mrs. Sevier used to refer to him, would also follow with his antics.

Mayavati is exposed to depredation from wild animals. In the jungles around there are barking deer and antelopes, leop-

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ards, and sometimes tigers as well as bears. The deer, though innocent looking, do much damage to the crops and vegetables. The antelopes, when they cannot reach the branches of fruit trees, shake them with their bodies, so that fruits drop down. Parrots and hornets also cause havoc to the fruits. Leopards, as also tigers, sometimes attack the Ashrama cows as they graze, and succeed in killing them. Attempts to lure them to the kill did not prove successful. Tigers' growls are heard now and then, and sometimes man-eaters also prowl about. Once a man-eater killed an exceptionally strong man belonging to the next village. He was cutting grass at about sunset in the jungles near the Ashrama, when he was attacked from behind. On information being received that the man had not returned home in the evening, a search party was sent out with lanterns, but no trace could be found in the night. Next morning, the party came across the remnants of his body, with the tiger at some distance. Once, in order to frighten the deer, a lantern was placed under an apple tree in the fenced garden. To our surprise, we found in the morning large footprints of a tiger that went round and round the light to satisfy his curiosity. It was an eye-opener to one of our Swamis, who, on the common notion that tigers keep clear of lights, used to wave a lantern as a warning to them, while going to an outhouse near the jungle. Among other nuisances at Mayavati, leeches in the rainy season and fleas almost throughout the year are the worst. Leeches make it an ordeal to take even a short walk. One has to play at carrom with them as they, on hearing footsteps, rush to climb the shoes. Some loss of blood is the penalty for carelessness with regard to them. Fleas, too, often baffle all our ingenuity to avoid them. The absence of mosquitoes is a great relief.

Forest fires are also a great menace to the Ashrama. Villagers in the hills, in order to promote the growth of grass for fodder, start fires at the foot of a hill, which spread upwards and destroy innumerable plants. They look like shining garlands at night, but become a positive danger when they come too close to habitations. The Mayavati Ashrama often had to fight against such fires. One indirect benefit of these, however, is that leeches are practically eliminated for the year.

In an out-of-the-way place like Mayavati, one has to be very alert so as to meet any emergency that may arise. Fortunately, we had in our midst a Swami who was equal to any occasion. People who came to Mayavati for medicines or for some other purpose, or who passed through it on their way to Lohaghat or Champavat, would sometimes take some fruits or vegetables from our garden without permission. One day, in the rainy season, the postman from Lohaghat, who used to carry milk for us daily from a roadside village, was on his way back with the empty can, when the above-mentioned Swami, for no known reason whatsoever, had a notion that he might be taking away some egg-plant seedlings. Down he hurried from the Ashrama, overtook the man at some distance beyond the gate, and quite casually asked him to show what was in the can. Sure enough, the seedlings were there! The man, thoroughly discomfited, was let go with a warning. By the way, it was at his suggestion, prompted by his desire to rid himself of the daily trouble of having to climb a mile of steep ascent each way, that we applied, successfully, for a post office at Mayavati itself.

Mayavati has its lighter side also. As a diversion, the monks occasionally indulge in practical jokes at somebody's expense. One or two, for instance, were sent out in torrential rain under the plea of an invitation from the sub-divisional officer or some such person. Of course the joke would not be carried too far. One such prank was played on a very clever young monk, who was directed by a faked telegram, purporting to come from the Headquarters, to proceed to Rangoon and take charge of a preaching centre. He soon warmed up to the idea, and got ready by

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collecting, among other things, a complete set of the back volumes of *Prabuddha Bharata* as a help to his future work. Two American lady devotees were staying at Mayavati at the time, who, being taken into confidence, arranged a farewell feast in his honour. A photograph was taken, and on the appointed day a large party started to see him off, but without his baggage. When a respectable guest, who had been kept in the dark about the affair, pointed out that the baggage was left behind, he had to be silenced. After the party had gone some distance, and the Swami was taking his final leave of them, he was handed a slip containing a couplet of Rabindranath Tagore, in which a grain-stealing bird was told that its day of reckoning was come. At first he thought that *this* was a joke, and was eager to proceed, since it was getting late. When, however, the painful truth came home to him, he was stupefied!

Another Swami, a guest, who on account of his knowledge of certain Yogic postures and processes considered himself a Yogi, was fooled by a card trick into believing that the performer, the resourceful monk previously mentioned, was an adept in thought-reading. So he approached the latter at dead of night and expressed his eagerness to know how it was done. The other, in order to continue the joke, said in all seriousness that before it could be imparted, certain very rigorous conditions must be satisfied! This damped the ardour of the inquirer.

Another inmate, who had a liking for milk and had at one time run a *Goshala* (cow-stall) at Tanakpur, once gave occasion for mirth. Some members had the idea of inserting his name in the Birthday Honours list. Unfortunately, the only blank space left in those columns of the paper was under the title 'Shams-ul-Ulema', which is reserved for the highest Islamic scholarship. Since there was no other way, that very space was quickly utilized to imprint the required name. When the paper was opened in the presence of all, congratulations were showered upon the lucky recipient of honour, together with the explanation that it must be due to his services in connection with the *Goshala.* The inappropriateness of the honour was a serious handicap; so he doubted its genuineness. But he was told that he could verify it in another daily on the next day. That day he was kept engaged for a little while, and when, on the mails being brought, he removed the wrapper of the newspaper, he found his name there also. Then his only question was why that particular title should have been given to him. But he did not seem to disbelieve it altogether. Had it been 'Rai Saheb' or some such other title, we could have scored a complete success.

Once, on the last day of the year, one of the Swamis rang the dinner bell which hung below the staircase at midnight, took another Swami into confidence, and quietly slipped into his bed upstairs. Startled by the sound, the other inmates got up one by one, and wondered who could have rung the bell. They began a thorough search of the Ashrama premises. The other two kept on trying to explain it away, and when, at the end of an hour, no trace of any intruder could be found, they solemnly attributed it to the spirit of Captain Sevier, who thus sent his New Year's greetings to the inmates!

Mayavati has its supply of water from a near-by spring. Once, in order to bring the water to the Ashrama itself, two monks enthusiastically set out to dig a channel for it. But it was summer, and they had not calculated the rate of flow. The result was that the dry earth soaked all the water that entered the channel before it covered one-third of the distance. This made the two pioneers cry halt in their labour of love. Later on, however, arrangements were made to have the water conveyed in a pipe to the Ashrama.

Mention should be made of Mrs. Sevier's Bhutiya dog, Glama. He was not just an ordinary dog, but a highly psychological being. Shortly after my reaching Mayavati, I saw one of the Brahmacharins pose to snatch away the

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dog's food, repeating, as he did so, 'I shall have it!' When I asked him why he was teasing the animal like that, he said that otherwise the dog would not eat, but just hold the bread. I soon saw that it was a fact. There must be a rival claimant to his possession before he would enjoy it himself! On account of age, he was blind of one eye, was subject to fits of asthma, and had a poor memory. Sometimes, while going to Mother's Bungalow with a piece of bread in his mouth, he would bury it in the ground with the intention of eating it afterwards. But he would invariably miss the exact spot, and a pair of watchful crows would help themselves to the food in his stead! He had a tendency to sleep at night in the President's deep chair. So we had to upturn a small chair on it to prevent his doing so. Then one day poor Glama died. Mrs. Sevier was so deeply moved by it that she would not see anybody that day, and she arranged for a decent burial of her faithful dog.

Many of those who were closely connected with the Mayavati Ashrama for a considerable length of time are now occupying important positions in the Organization. Chief of them is [Swami Virajananda] the present President of the Order. Associated with the Ashrama from its very inception, he was its second President, as also the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, this double function continuing up to the time of his successor, Swami Prajnananda (1918). A good many ex-workers, including Swami Prakashananda, were or are heads of centres in America or of important centres in India; some are holding responsible posts at the Headquarters; while a few more have distinguished themselves in other capacities. Swami Vivekananda's dictum, 'Work is Worship', is spontaneously instilled into one's mind at Mayavati. Its very tradition does this. When one hears that so great a person as Swami Turiyananda, one of the foremost disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, once acted as a fly-boy for the Prabuddha Bharata Press, one cannot help realizing that work is indeed on the same footing as worship or meditation. His example was cheerfully followed in our time also, one of the brothers sometimes doing even the hard job of the ink-boy. The service which the publications of this Ashrama have rendered to truth-seekers all over the world is inestimable. The sense of peace and joy experienced by a stay at Mayavati is shared by all, inmates and guests alike. Mayavati is a happy link between the East and the West, between the past and the present, between contemplation and action. Those who cannot do without the amenities of modern city life, may find the place too solitary or dull; but those in whom the least hunger for spiritual realization has arisen, and who, rising above the intellectual plane, want to commune with the Spirit immanent in Nature and in their own selves, will hail this Ashrama as a fountain-head of perennial bliss — the precious gift of Swami Vivekananda to care-worn humanity. ❐

It [the Self] is that which transcends hunger and thirst, grief, delusion, old age, and death. Having realized this Self, brahmins give up the desire for sons, the desire for wealth, and the desire for the worlds, and lead the life of mendicants. That which is the desire for sons is the desire for wealth, and that which is the desire for wealth is the desire for the worlds; for both these are but desires. Therefore a brahmin, after he is done with scholarship, should try to live on that strength which comes of scholarship. After he is done with that ... he becomes meditative, and after he is done with both meditativeness and non-meditativeness, he becomes a knower of Brahman.

—*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, III.5.1

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Reminiscences of Mayavati Ashrama

SWAMI PAVITRANANDA

Swami Pavitranandaji was the sixth President of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. In the following pages we have his reminiscences about Mayavati. The article is reprinted from the January 1950 issue of Prabuddha Bharata.

As a student I went once to Belur Math. There was a Swami of the Order who acted as my guide. As I was going upstairs to see the room of Swami Vivekananda in the main building of the monastery, on the wall above the staircase was a magnificent picture of the Mayavati Ashrama. It arrested my attention, and I stopped to see the picture more carefully. At this the Swami, my companion, remarked, 'What are you looking at so intently? Well, there will come a time when you will go there and live as one of the members of the Ashrama.' The very thought that I might one day go to Mayavati and stay there, filled me with a thrill.

While we were students, we would speak and hear of Mayavati with awe and reverence. Mayavati was the Himalayan Ashrama founded by Swami Vivekananda. It was in the abode of Shiva. Monks lived there to develop their spiritual life in that great solitude. All these ideas were associated with the Ashrama at Mayavati to our young, imaginative minds. And the *Prabuddha Bharata*, though at that time it was published on none too good paper and its printing was not very admirable — with how much eagerness would we read it! Every word that was printed in it had a special message, and the magazine belonged to a class by itself — far above the level of any other periodical in the country! Such were our ideas — may be, the result of our exuberant imagination.

Afterwards it was the will of the Lord that I should actually join the monastic Order and one day find myself at Mayavati. In the beginning of my monastic life, when I was at Belur Math, I had a severe illness and Swami Shivananda, the then President of the Order, once told me, 'Don't worry, I will send you to some good place.' Afterwards he actually did, and I had the supreme privilege and opportunity to work as a member of the Mayavati Ashrama for about twenty-four years. Advisedly I say — it was a 'supreme privilege', for what a great dream Swami Vivekananda cherished with respect to Mayavati! It was to be a place where his Eastern and Western disciples were to meet and perform spiritual practices in order to realize their Oneness with the Ultimate Reality. It was to be a centre from where were to emanate and spread spiritual thoughts to act as the healing balm to the afflicted humanity.

'Wherever there has been expansion in love or progress in well-being, of individuals or numbers, it has been through the perception, realization, and the practicalization of the Eternal Truth — the *Oneness of All Beings*.... Hitherto it has not been possible to preach this Noble Truth entirely free from the settings of dualistic weakness; this alone, we are convinced, explains why it has not been more operative and useful to mankind at large.

'To give this One Truth a freer and fuller scope in elevating the lives of individuals and leavening the mass of mankind, we start this Advaita Ashrama on the Himalayan heights, the land of its first expiration.'

—Thus wrote Swami Vivekananda in March 1899, when the Ashrama was first started, with regard to its aims and objects. And to be chosen as workers — pygmies like us — in

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order to carry out that mighty scheme! — was not that a supreme privilege? How many times have we not thought, as we looked at the Ashrama, 'What a great idea of Swami Vivekananda this Ashrama represents! What a great hope the Swami cherished with regard to this institution!' And as one thought of this, one felt almost overwhelmed with the responsibility, and prayed that one might become a fit instrument — however unworthy by oneself one might be — for the fulfilment of the dream of the Swami.

The Ashrama was started by Captain and Mrs. Sevier, the two English disciples of Swami Vivekananda, with Swami Swarupananda as its first President. Captain and Mrs. Sevier met Swami Vivekananda first in London where he was lecturing. They were fed up with the Church-religion and were athirst for something more inspiring. As they listened to the Swami's lecture, the Captain said to his wife, 'What he says seems to ring true.' Mrs. Sevier also agreed with the opinion of her husband. And it took them no time to give up their all and follow the Master. Within an incredibly short time they sold whatever they had and came to India to work for the cause of the Swami. Swami Vivekananda also was very much impressed with the devotion of the Sevier couple. He addressed Mrs. Sevier as 'Mother' at the very first time he met her, and after that he was both a son and a Teacher to her. Imagine their strength and courage! In the nineties of the last century, when the Britishers were in the heyday of their power in India, when Englishmen thought it beneath their dignity to mix with Indians, this English couple flung away their so-called prestige and dignity, openly faced the contempt of their friends, relations, and society and came to India as devoted followers of a 'heathen', and settled down in the far away regions of the Himalayas at Mayavati. At that time Mayavati was much more inaccessible than today, and the amenities of life were much fewer. But nothing daunted, these two English disciples settled there — at a place where there was no society, no friends, no medical help, where the bare necessaries of life were very hard to obtain. When Captain Sevier died at Mayavati, medical help came from a distance of thirty miles, and the man who administered it was not a qualified doctor either — he was only a compounder. At that time Swami Vivekananda was in Egypt, travelling with a party of Western disciples. There he had some premonition of a coming calamity, and all of a sudden he gave up the plan of further travel and started for India by the first available boat. But when he arrived at Belur Math, he got the sad news of the passing away of Captain Sevier.

In a letter dated Belur Math, 11 December 1900, he writes to an American disciple: 'I arrived the night before last. Alas! My hurrying was of no use. Poor Captain Sevier passed away a few days ago — thus two great Englishmen gave up their lives for us — us the Hindus. This is martyrdom — if anything is. Mrs. Sevier I have written to just now, to know her decision.'

Mrs. Sevier's decision was to continue her stay in that lonely place. Bold heart indeed! If Mayavati has done any service to India and the world or will do any further service in future, the credit goes mainly to Mrs. Sevier. People do not know how much they are indebted to that courageous English lady. Once a friend of Mrs. Sevier asked her how she could imagine to stay at Mayavati — that remote, almost inaccessible, lonely place. Did she not feel monotony? 'No', replied the devoted disciple. 'When I feel time heavy on me, I remember the Swami.' So she remained at Mayavati, passing her days in the constant remembrance of her guru.

Swami Vivekananda paid a visit to Mayavati in the first week of January 1901, and stayed there for about a fortnight. He was extremely pleased with the atmosphere and environment of the Ashrama at Mayavati. He also expressed a desire that he would build a hermitage at Dharamgarh, the highest hill

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within the Mayavati boundaries, so that he could meditate in solitude undisturbed. Another favourite spot of the Swami was the walk by the side of the 'lake'. He said, 'In the later part of my life, I shall give up all public work and pass my days in writing books and whistling merry tunes by this lake free as a child.' Alas, he was not to live long. He passed away the next year.

Other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna took particular interest in the activities of the Mayavati Ashrama. Many of them visited the Ashrama. Swami Turiyananda along with Swami Swarupananda edited some of the writings of Swami Vivekananda. Swami Brahmananda, in sending any worker to Mayavati, would half-jocosely remark that the worker was given a prize post, that is he would get many rare facilities for the development of his spiritual life by being a member of the Mayavati Ashrama. While sending a worker to that place, Swami Brahmananda said that to live in such an environment was in itself very conducive to spiritual progress and one who would take some particular care about spiritual practices would improve marvellously. Many of the workers were veterans. They gave complete satisfaction to the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who were then guiding the affairs of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Some of these disciples of the Master, though staying at Belur Math or some such place, would keep detailed information about Mayavati affairs. I remember that once, while I came on a visit from Mayavati to Belur Math, I committed to memory many particulars of the Ashrama, its trees, the number of cattle in the cow-shed, and so on. For I knew that Swami Shivananda, the then President of the Order, would ask me many such detailed questions, and I did not like to betray my ignorance and play a fool. Even in his very old age I saw him reading the *Prabuddha Bharata*. Once he remarked that the types of the journal were too close for his eyes. Because that remark was in my memory, when opportunities came we made some changes in the printing arrangements.

I went to Mayavati in April 1925. In the first night at Mayavati I had a very strange experience. My sleep was broken in the middle of the night — I don't know why — and I found the silence of the place quite oppressive. Such a great silence I had never experienced all my life. In the plains also there is silence at night, but still now and then you hear some sound — distant or near — say, the barking of a dog, the cooing of some bird or so, — but here the silence was, as it were, breathless. I confess I was seized with some unknown fear, and to allay that I sat in meditation. The next day's experience also was no better. In the morning, after breakfast, as I sat in a relaxing mood on the bench in the verandah outside, I felt as though I was a prisoner in that place and as I looked at the surrounding hills, I felt as if they were the prison walls. How could I stay in such a place? — was my inner reaction. Fortunately, I did not disclose my feeling to anyone. But as days passed by and I began to enter into the spirit of the place, I liked it more and more, and no monotony seized me. At all seasons Mayavati had its charm for me. Its gorgeous view of the snow-range in the autumn and winter, the roaring sound of waterfalls in the rains (the mention of the troublesome leeches invading you in your very room will be out of place here), the blazing profusion of rhododendron flowers in early spring and the stately deodars kissing the sky, the rustling noise of the pine trees, ferns of different shades and colour looking at you as you go along on your evening walks — all give zest to your life at Mayavati.

How many times had I (accompanied by somebody for safety) not gone out for a walk in the woods before dawn, just to enjoy the silence under the starlit sky; how many times had we not gone out for a walk in the jungles of thick forests, just to enjoy doing something unusual! Sometimes it would be a nice change to go for a long walk all alone — in a philosophical mood — but for an unconscious fear that you might meet some wild animals.

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There have been cases when some of our Swamis saw tigers or bears during their walks. Though such cases had not been too many — their number was sufficient to scare the newcomers or the more timid amongst us. There are some set stories about the Swamis seeing tigers and panthers or wild bears. They would be now and then told at night, after our meals, when we met together, and it would be worth looking at the faces of those who had 'wild-animal phobia' turning pale. Afterwards the firm assurance from some senior monks that though there have been many occasions when tigers and bears were seen, there has not been a single case that a tiger or a bear actually attacked anybody in or near about the Ashrama compound — would put courage to the fear-stricken heart. There came a visitor Swami to Mayavati. He was very much afraid of tigers. Some (more mischievous) amongst us played a great trick with him. One night a person simulated himself as a tiger with a big tiger-skin rolled round his body, and the Swami was shown it in all gravity and seriousness giving the effect of a tiger actually coming near the Ashrama building. He was greatly alarmed, and for one or two days the important subject of talk in the Ashrama was that tiger incident. Afterwards the real fact was disclosed to him. But he would not believe it! He thought that the later version was concocted only to drive away his fear, as if he was a mere child! Henceforward that Swami got the appellation of 'Tiger-Swami' and on the occasion of the following Vijaya festivity he was presented with a toy-tiger. These are only the lighter sides of Mayavati life which make the stay over there all the more enjoyable and the performance of allotted works and duties all the more serious and earnest.

At Mayavati one can clearly see how Nature can supply spiritual sustenance to a man's soul. Living at this place for some time one does not feel surprised that the British poet Wordsworth would get into a trance, while in communion with Nature and that his corporeal breath would stop. Here sometimes to walk alone is to get the experience of deep meditation, and behind the silence of the woods one can feel a great Presence. At the Ashrama there is no shrine or any provision for ritualistic worship. It is indeed in the fitness of the surroundings. To have a temple built of bricks and mortar in a place where cosmic worship is going on in the shrine of Nature would have been a great tragedy. With a little inwardness one can easily feel that the whole surrounding represents a great, sublime worship of the *Virat*. For personal devotions and worship one has simply to fall in line with that.

Once a Polish professor came to Mayavati. As we were showing her the vast snow-range in the north, some of us said, 'If you look at that, you feel, as it were, a living Presence.' 'You too say "as it were"?' she remarked in a surprised tone. She meant that it is *actually* a living Presence, and not 'as it were a living Presence'.

The name and reputation of Mayavati have drawn many visitors and guests to the Ashrama from its very beginning. Ananda Mohan Bose, the great Brahmo reformer, Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, the famous scientist, Chittaranjan Das, the great fighter for the cause of India's political freedom — came and stayed here for a period. Of the visitors who had come here in recent years, Nandalal Bose, the famous artist of Visvabharati, impressed us most. He stayed at Mayavati only for a very short time. By nature he is a man of few words. At Mayavati he was found all the more taciturn and contemplative. We expected that he would be drawing many pictures at Mayavati. But to our great surprise, he did not draw a single one. When we expressed our astonishment to him, he said, 'I do not feel like making any sketch here. I am trying to absorb the spirit of the environment. That is a great thing. And it may be when I shall go back to my work, the influence of my stay here will be reflected in my works.' In such words we found in him more of a phi-

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losopher than an artist. Perhaps he was right. For has it not been said that the highest art is the highest worship? Sri Ramakrishna himself was a great artist. The songs he would sing were divinely melodious. Though living constantly in the supernatural plane, he was an extreme lover of order and neatness.

One can do very much concentrated work at Mayavati. Perhaps this is true of all hill stations. But Mayavati has not got the usual distractions of hill stations. The Ashrama, situated in the midst of forests, with no human habitation near by, has got a very uplifting influence on one's mind. Even those who had been to many hill stations in India or abroad say that Mayavati has got an atmosphere of sublimity which is rare at any other place. Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, the famous scientist, who had been to Mayavati four or five times, used to say, 'When I am at Mayavati, ideas rush into my mind, but when I am in Calcutta, everything seems to dry up.'

It was a delight to see some of the members doing very hard work. Their steadfastness, their devotion to duty, their love for Swamiji, in whose name they would work — were a source of inspiration to others. It was a privilege to work and associate oneself with such souls. It was because of such earnest hands that the Mayavati work had so much thrived. Otherwise hands were never too many at Mayavati. As a matter of fact, in comparison with the work that was to be done, hands had often been short.

In addition to regular classes, at times great stimulus had been given to our intellectual life. For some years, there would be what we used to call Sunday 'Lecture Class', when one of us would give a talk on some particularly philosophical subject and some others afterwards would discuss the points raised by the previous speaker. In these discussions sometimes there would be found great originality of thought or boldness of outlook — for no authority, no tradition, no personality would be considered too sacrosanct. One particularly remembers the period of about one year when Swami Yatiswarananda — latterly Head of the Vedanta Centre at Philadelphia, U.S.A. — was with us for a change to recuperate his health. He was our permanent 'president' in those lecture classes. Even though the subjects were trifling to him, with how much preparation would he come to our class! His thoroughness and labour would give us the stimulus to be very earnest and assiduous in our own works.

Sometimes those classes would take an interesting turn also. One summer Swami Shuddhananda (afterwards Secretary [1927–1934] and then President [May to October] in 1938 of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission), was amongst us. He proposed that he would hear our discussion on the following subject: Whether the political independence of India was absolutely necessary for the protection of Indian Religion and Culture; if so, what could be the means of attaining India's freedom in the present circumstances of the British rule. He suggested that in the discussion each one of us must have to speak and there would be no exception. At Mayavati we were in God's own land. There were no alien people, there could be no police or C.I.D. So for three or four days — in morning and evening sittings — we discussed this momentous subject. It was very interesting, and instructive too, to see how some of us — monks, who had renounced the world! — reacted on this topic.

In this connection one remembers the great enthusiasm which some of us exhibited when the 'Independence Resolution' was first moved in the Indian National Congress. We were all joy and enthusiasm. And out of our overflowing fervour we celebrated the occasion by a feast! Mind you, all this was done in a lighter and relaxing mood, as a sort of diversion! — for we are pledged to do only religious, cultural, and philanthropic works. At that time the then President of the Ashrama was away on a tour — and we, some youngsters, organized this function.

But however non-political we were,

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some educated young men — specially some of them being Bengalis — living in a Himalayan seclusion, did not fail to rouse the suspicion of the police and the C.I.D. We did not know how and what secret information they would keep regarding us, but now and then they would openly come to us for information regarding the names of the members, the arrival of new visitors, and so on. During the last war, such things were regular and sometimes troublesome too. In this connection we remember an interesting incident. It was after the fall of Burma. There was a rumour that some strange people (Japanese?) had come to the Kumaon Hills. One day a top-ranking official — Burmese by nationality — came to our Ashrama, and frankly declared himself to belong to the C.I.D., asked for some information. As we had nothing to hide, the business ended very quickly. It was tea-time, and we offered him tea. The man was visibly moved and blurted forth: 'We C.I.D. people are considered as pests. We are hated by all people. Nobody ever shows us any compassion or courtesy. I am really surprised at your human consideration.' We replied, 'You may be a C.I.D. man, but you are a human being first.'

Many top-ranking British officials would visit Mayavati — perhaps out of disinterested curiosity or to gather information about us. Sometimes they were frank and from their talks we could know their outlook. During the last war, a party of Europeans visited the Ashrama — one of them was a Colonel. We asked him, 'When Mahatma Gandhi was fasting in jail, how did you, military people, look at the thing?' Taking us into confidence but forgetting that we were Indians, he said, 'Many of these political leaders are dishonest.' We replied, 'How can you make such a sweeping remark? There are good and bad people everywhere. Can you say that in England there are only good people and no bad ones?' He took this retort in a very good spirit and without the slightest resentment.

These are but the external sides of Mayavati life. The inner aspect of the Ashrama life was very strong, active, and dynamic. The fact that Swamiji held so high hopes about the Ashrama, the thought that the stalwarts of the Ramakrishna Order, we mean the chief disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, keenly watched the progress of the institution, spurred all the members to action and created in them an enthusiasm to better their lives. Every institution has got its own tradition; and culture, which are its assets and its strength. Mayavati also has built up its own tradition. The stories of how our predecessors had worked and lived would go down from one batch of members to another. Swami Swarupananda was the first President of the Ashrama. He was such a great personality that he commanded love and respect from one and all. Mrs. Sevier and Sister Nivedita would respect him almost as their teacher, though he was only a *gurubhai* (brother-disciple) to them. One who worked in the *Prabuddha Bharata* Press at this time narrates, with almost tears in his eyes, how he was the recipient of extreme love and affection from Swami Swarupananda. He [Swami Swarupananda] was given much to meditation. Seeking a much more quiet place than even the Mayavati Ashrama, he lived for a period in a tent at a little distance from the monastery. But, it is said, there was found a tiger prowling near the tent one day, so it was desirable not to live in an unprotected place. Afterwards he built a meditation cabin, which still exists as a reminder to the younger members to pursue their contemplative life vigorously. Unfortunately the Swami passed away in 1906 at a very young age. It was such a tragic event that one wondered whether the Ashrama would continue. After him Swami Virajananda was elected President. Despite his love for meditative life, he worked day and night unsparingly in order to stabilize the Ashrama. As a matter of fact, it was his hard work and unparalleled industry that brought out the *Complete Works* (then in five volumes) and the biography of Swami Vivekananda.

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The Ashrama's Charitable Hospital

Patient's eyes being examined

A burn case being treated

Female indoor ward

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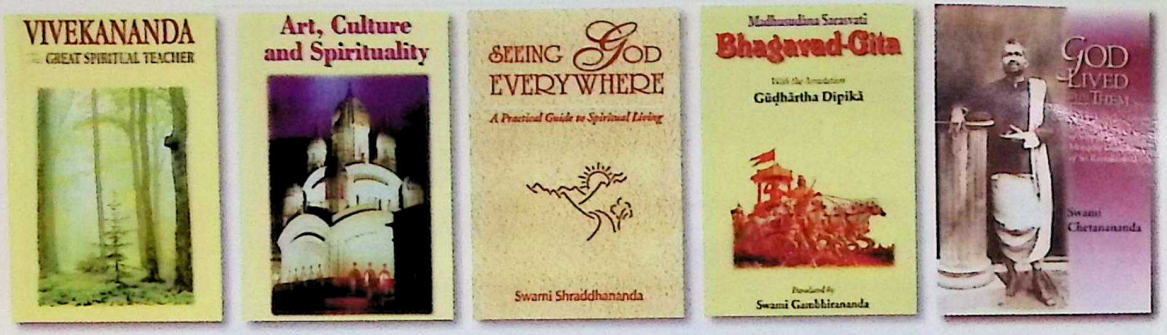
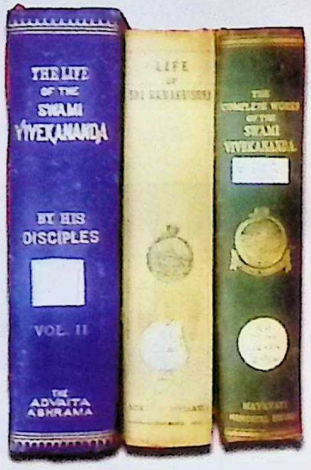
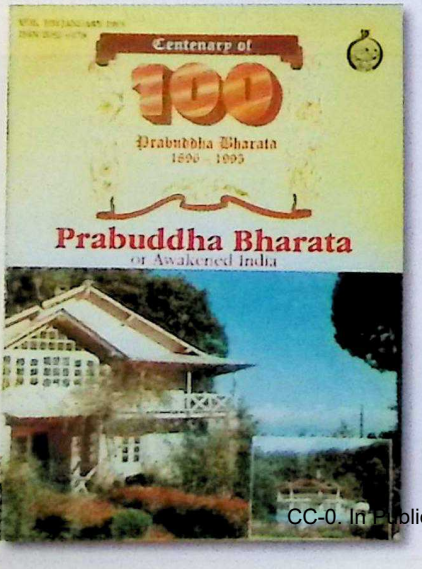


Some of our new publications

The Library, the original room in which Swamiji stayed when in Mayavati

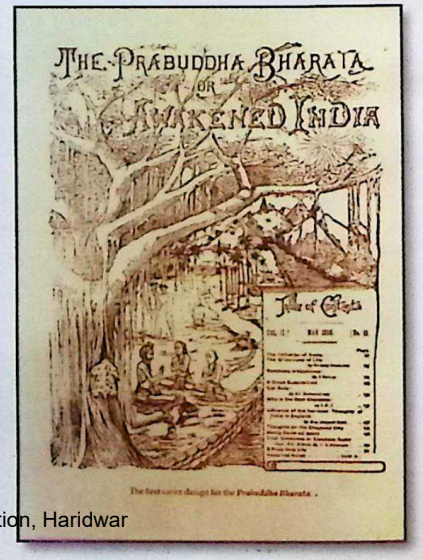


Old publications



Prabuddha Bharata Centenary Volume

The first Prabuddha Bharata cover in May 1896



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After him Swami Prajnananda was the President. In his pre-monastic days he was the right-hand man of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh in organizing the revolutionary movement in Bengal.

Along with Sri Aurobindo he was tried in the famous Alipore Bomb Case and was released. By his keen intellect, sober judgement, rare wisdom, above all calm and never-to-be-ruffled temperament, he was a tower of strength as well as the source of inspiration to all who were his colleagues or looked to him for guidance. Even Swami Saradananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, remarked with poignant grief at his premature death, '...as if my right hand had been chopped off.' There were other Swamis who had left great reputations behind because of their exemplary life and character and who loomed large before the imagination of the younger members.

In a place like Mayavati, work and meditation can be very perfectly balanced. Though some of the members have to work pretty hard, none has the cause of any complaint that he has not sufficient opportunity for meditation. But still, now and then there would come waves of enthusiasm to devote more time and energy to meditation. This would happen when some Swamis, released from normal duties or coming as guests from some other centre, devoted their time exclusively to meditation. Their examples would supply stimulus to the other ones longing for that kind of life. In the same way, there had come impetus for intellectual life also. When any of its members or any visitor Swami had exceptional intellectual aptitude, talks and discussions centering round him would create an atmosphere of intellectual outlook, of fresh thinking, and wider reading.

In the process of time, Mayavati has developed side-activities also. A dispensary, not in the original plan of the Ashrama, was started in 1903, which has afterwards developed into a full-fledged hospital, ministering to the suffering people of a very vast area. Patients come even from a distance of 70 to 80 miles, covering the journey in a week's time or so. Even in the outdoor dispensary, patients come from a distance of 15 to 20 miles. The Publication Department, when it became too unwieldy, was shifted to Calcutta, where better facilities for printing and distribution were available. Now the Ashrama has four kinds of activities — (1) Publication of religious literature, (2) The monthly journal *Prabuddha Bharata*, (3) Hospital, and (4) Sending out preachers.

If one looks at the present growth of the Ashrama from a very humble and insignificant beginning fifty years back, one feels, not unjustifiably, glad and proud. The books sent from the Ashrama have reached thousands of homes in India and different parts of the world and have helped to develop the spiritual life of the readers, giving them strength in the hour of distress, solace in the time of suffering, or changing their entire outlook on life. These books have carried the message of India to the outside world, have fostered love for their ancient religion in the Indians and have steadied the minds of those wavering in their faith in the spiritual heritage of the Motherland. The service that the journal *Prabuddha Bharata* has rendered for more than half a century is not inconsiderable. It would be the cause of pride to any management, though the least hankering after any recognition of services rendered is a negation of spirituality. The Ashrama has also sent out many preachers. Some of the ex-members of the Ashrama did and have been doing works in two hemispheres which have shed the lustre of glory on India.

Here the question arises, whether we have been able to fulfil the dreams of the great Swami with regard to the Ashrama. Of course, partially we have. But that, to what extent? At a certain time I used to ask some senior monks of our Order, who worked at the helm of affairs, what the vital points were, that should be emphasized in Mayavati ac-

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tivities, so that the Ashrama might rightly represent the ideas of Swami Vivekananda. How are we to guide its activities? How were we to conduct ourselves? Different Swamis gave different opinions. But one given by Swami Shuddhananda, one of the most favourite disciples of Swami Vivekananda, stands out prominent in my memory. He said, 'If you can realize Truth and thereby directly or indirectly help others to realize Truth, you will be fulfilling the real object of the Master.' That was true, but too abstract and absolute! Swami Shuddhananda was such a sweet and loving soul that we could be very free in discussions with him. So I began to argue, 'Why, what do you think of the vast volume of literature the Ashrama has spread, the preachers it has sent out, the suffering patients its hospital has served, and so on?' Incidentally I referred to the similar good works of other centres of our Order. The Swami warmed up, and got a bit excited too, and said, 'No, these things are very secondary in the plan of Swami Vivekananda. The first thing is, you must realize Truth, you must have a direct perception of Truth. That is the most essential thing. If you can succeed in that, you have really fulfilled the expectations of Swamiji.'

These words still ring in my ears. And as I think of the great expansion of the work of the Mayavati Ashrama, I inwardly rejoice but at the same time I say to myself, 'Yes, these are good, very good indeed. But more is wanted. The Ashrama is to give succour to the spiritually thirsty. Swamiji wanted that this Ashrama should be the meeting ground of the Eastern and Western devotees. Their hunger and hankering can be truly satisfied if one can give them firsthand information about the Highest Truth. Thereby only real good can be done to them, by that only can one give them right guidance.'

But that is not an easy task.❐

A tiger killed by the Tahsildar of Champawat

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The Mayavati Experience

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

Revered Maharaj, the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, was a monastic inmate of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, associated with the editorial department of Prabuddha Bharata. *Earlier to that he was associated with* Prabuddha Bharata *from its Publication Department at Calcutta. In the following reminiscences about Mayavati, Revered Maharaj takes the reader rapidly through the various faces of Mayavati, each of which is highly charming and uplifting. As Revered Maharaj observes, Mayavati is truly a heaven for those who have embarked on the inward journey or are earnest about it.*

Mayavati! The very name evokes memories of the sky-kissing snow-peaks of the Himalayas, the evergreen forests of deodar and pine, the rhododendrons in bloom in spring, setting the forests ablaze as it were, the azure sky, the birds, the flowers, and the mystic silence — indeed, it is all so different from the din and bustle of city life, its pollution, and so on. And the mind longs to be back there in the Himalayas!

Even before my first sight of the Himalayas, I had been attracted to them, and I was looking for an opportunity to visit some place in the Himalayas. That came about in 1954 when I could visit Almora for a brief eight days. Swami Vivekananda had visited this quiet hill resort thrice. Swami Turiyananda and Swami Shivananda (Mahapurush Maharaj) too spent some years at Almora in *tapasya* and, in fact, the Ramakrishna Kutir there came up due to their efforts. With its salubrious climate and the sight of the Himalayan peaks of Trishul, Nanda Devi, etc., the mind was not only soothed but was lifted to sublime heights. However, I had to leave Almora — with an intense longing to come back to the Himalayas.

But to be posted for working at Mayavati was only a distant dream to me! In fact, I never thought it would come about. However, my transfer to the Calcutta Office of the Advaita Ashrama, that too to work for the *Prabuddha Bharata*, opened up an opportunity to go to Mayavati. And it came about in spring time in 1961. Swami Gambhiranandaji was the President of the Mayavati Advaita Ashrama. (Later on he rose to be the General Secretary and ultimately the President of the Ramakrishna Order.) He told me to get ready to go to Mayavati along with him in early April 1961 — a boon never expected, but greatly longed for.

After a brief halt at Varanasi and Lucknow, we reached Tanakpur, the railhead for the eastern Kumaon hills, in the evening and put up in an inn full of bed-bugs! In the morning we were to immediately leave for Lohaghat by bus, but we could not get seats in the only bus that left every morning. It took a lot of persuasion by Swami Gambhiranandaji to make the manager of the bus service to run an extra trip at 1 p.m. to Lohaghat. Finally, we reached Lohaghat at 8.30 p.m. In those days there were hardly 3 or 4 tea shops at the Lohaghat bus stand. (Now it is a busy bazar.) We had to carry all the luggage to one of the tea shops, leave it there, and start walking to Mayavati with our torches on. By the bridle-path Mayavati is 3½ miles away, the first mile being a stiff ascent. Swamis from Mayavati had come in the afternoon to receive us but, finding that the bus came without us, went back thinking that we would not reach there that day. They knew well that in those days only one bus came to Lohaghat every day.

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It was pitch dark. Revered Gambhiranandaji was leading the way. Being new to the place, I was just following him. In one place a second path was seen. So he stopped and was — as it appeared to me — not sure which of the two paths to take. I asked, 'Maharaj, have you lost the way?' He didn't reply, but later on told the Ashrama inmates, 'You see, I am coming here for the last 10 years, and this boy was asking me whether I lost the way!'

We reached the Ashrama at 10.15 p.m. All had gone to bed, as they were not expecting us that day. So, when we called out to the swamis, it was a pleasant surprise to them. Tired, we went to bed after taking some puffed rice and milk.

The Ashrama's garden was adorned with giant roses. Red rhododendrons were still in bloom here and there. And the stately deodars stood majestically against the background of the Himalayan snow-range. For me it was heaven!

Apart from the slow-paced work, there were walks in the woods, badminton in the evenings, and occasional trekking programmes on Sundays. Summer came and with that the guests too, trying to escape the scorching heat of the plains. Indeed, the cool and pleasant summer at Mayavati must be the envy of those working in the plains! Summer was followed by the rainy season. And with that the mountain-paths became slushy. To make it more interesting, thousands of little leeches woke up from their long slumber to occupy these paths and were only too ready to stick to your feet and climb up leisurely to the upper parts of your anatomy to suck blood quietly without troubling you. Only when they had had their fill, they fell down, leaving the victim to discover the bloody act late. The wet clothes and the oozing blood revealed the secret!

The guest season brought many kinds of people. For Mayavati, populated by hardly ten persons, 15 or 20 guests make a crowd. On a rainy day in June, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Mr. C.B. Gupta came with a big retinue. He was a great admirer of Swami Vivekananda, and was anxious to see the room where Swamiji stayed when he visited Mayavati in January 1901. Mr. Gupta was led upstairs and was shown the cubicle which I was occupying. I had put my small suitcase over my table, covered it with an ochre cloth and placed a folder containing the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda. Mr. Gupta, with great devotion, prostrated himself before the pictures! In Advaitic Mayavati this was little short of sacrilege! Next day, Swami Gambhiranandaji, after our night class, pointed to me and said, 'He has arranged a shrine in his room, and Guptaji did a "Pranam" there!' The very next day, the holy pictures went inside the suitcase, instead of staying over it!

The rainy season has its own charm, in spite of the slush and the leeches. The active waterfalls, the roaring stream some 500 feet below the Ashrama, the migratory birds — all these make it interesting. When there is a break in the rains, the snow-peaks shine forth in their own glory.

The rains are followed by autumn, with its clear skies with millions of stars peeping out at night. The days are pleasant: the evergreen trees, the azure sky and the dazzling white snow-peaks in the horizon, present a wonderful contrast. In the Himalayas, the wild cherry blossom in the autumn presents an additional attraction!

Soon, winter heralds its entry by morning frost here and there. Gone are the bright autumn days. The sun lazily climbs, eagerly awaited by the Ashramites, but not before 8 a.m.! The grass dries up. Except the evergreen deodars, pines, rhododendrons and oaks, all other trees shed their leaves and go into a long slumber.

Again, the winter too can be appreciated. The stillness and the calm can turn our mind inward. But it was the first Mayavati winter for me and one or two other inmates. We were eagerly looking for witnessing the first snow-

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fall in our lives!

And it did not disappoint us. I remember, it was December 17. Of course, nearly four decades back! We were having our lunch. A boy came running and shouted, *'baraf girta hai* — snow is falling'. We quickly mopped up our lunch and ran outside. Already the ground had turned white. Snowflakes, like loose cotton, were falling slowly. Everything was still. There was not a whisper, even from the trees. The snowing continued till next evening — that is, for nearly thirty hours. And then the moon rose. It was a bright fortnight. What a wonderful scene! Everything was dazzling white — even the trees. The whole landscape had turned into a fairyland.

But not all were happy. The Manager Swamiji was worried about finding fodder for the cows. Another, who had experienced many a snowfall, was apprehensive of severe winter months ahead. Nevertheless, we all rolled the snow over our badminton court and made a snowman — 4-foot-high. An artistic swami gave him eyes and a moustache, and thrust a flag in his hand with the inscription '*Om tat sat*'! And we went out with gumboots on. Our legs were making holes in the powdery snow. But, alas, in the midst of all these, the water-supply had stopped. The water in the pipeline had frozen. So, water had to be rationed for the next few days!

I was not at Mayavati in the latter part of winter that year, as I had to leave for Calcutta on some urgent business. But I was back in early spring, to find Nature joyful. The gloomy, but meditative, winter was gone. Now fruit-trees were in bloom; and, of course, the wonderful rhododendrons. It was a riot of colours.

In the earliest years, Mayavati was really cut off from the scorching plains. One had to walk forty miles all the way from Tanakpur. In spite of that, in those days, *Prabuddha Bharata* used to be printed there and taken to Champavat on horseback — a distance of 5½ miles by bridle-path over the hills. Many swamis, who were pioneers and stalwarts, lived there in those days. Some western devotees were also there. Descriptions of life at Mayavati, enriched by interesting anecdotes, have been published in *Prabuddha Bharata* from time to time.

In the early sixties, when I was there, buses would come to Lohaghat, at a distance of 3½ miles by walk. There was no electricity. So, Mayavati was still not very easily accessible, though it was nothing compared to earlier years.

Now, electricity has arrived. The road has come up to the Ashrama. This brings sudden visitors, unannounced, often disturbing the peace and quiet of Mayavati. The movement of vehicles has driven the wild animals deeper into the forests.

Nevertheless, the forests are still preserved, thanks to the environmental consciousness of not only Mayavati-wallahs but the laws enacted for maintaining ecological balance! Even in 1975, when I happened to go into the forests, we were surprised by the sudden appearance of two full-grown leopards, when I was actually looking for the Himalayan *tahr*, an endangered animal. The barking deer do not visit our badminton court any more.

Swami Vivekananda had envisaged Mayavati as a meeting place of the East and the West. Though western monastics and devotees occasionally visit the place, it is far from developing into what it was intended to be. With all that, for a lover of nature and the Himalayas, seeking peace and quiet to spend a few days in silent meditation, Mayavati is indeed Heaven. ❐

Happiness presents itself before man, wearing the crown of sorrow on its head. He who welcomes it must also welcome sorrow.

Teachings of Swami Vivekananda, p. 107

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Unforgettable Days

SWAMI LOKESWARANANDA

Presently the Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta, Revered Swami Lokeswaranandaji Maharaj is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and an erudite scholar with a number of publications to his credit. He was a monastic worker in the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati for a brief period of nearly three years. In this short narration of his reminiscences, Revered Maharaj pictures for us his initial impression of the centres of the Ramakrishna Order at Shyamalatal and Mayavati which are truly unforgettable.

It was sometime in 1944. I was at Belur Math doing practically nothing. I was feeling bored with myself because I had no specific work to do, except that once in a while I was asked to write letters for a senior swami. One day somebody came and told me that the General Secretary was calling me. The General Secretary, Swami Madhavananda, was a strict disciplinarian, so I began to wonder what offence I might have committed for which he might scold me.

I went to his room with much trepidation. As usual, he was either reading or writing something. He did not raise his head, but he knew I was there. I paid my respects and then stood waiting for whatever it was he wanted to say to me. After quite a while he raised his head and said, with a hint of a smile on his face, 'There is good news for you.' I did not — dared not — ask what the news was, good or bad. I thought what he was going to say might not be good at all. His 'good' might be only a euphemism. I decided I had better keep quiet. After a while, the General Secretary said: 'You have been posted to Mayavati. That is a prestigious place. You are truly lucky. Go and see Swami Vireswarananda. He will give you whatever instructions you need.'

Swami Vireswarananda was then Assistant Secretary of the Mission. Earlier he had been President of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. When I went to see him, he told me to proceed to Mayavati immediately. With great hesitation I asked, 'May I know what my work will be?' Swami Vireswarananda was annoyed at my question and said, 'Anything they ask you to do.' I was sorry I had asked. I should have known better, and I deserved the rebuff. But I knew my limitations. Though the ideal is to obey any order the authorities might give, it is not always a practical proposition. I kept quiet.

Swami Vireswarananda must have noticed that I was hurt. As if to soothe my feelings, he asked, 'Don't you think it a privilege that you are being posted to a place like Mayavati?' To be frank, I had always coveted being posted there. How many stories I had heard about the Himalayan scenery, the forests, the tigers, the silence, and so on! But what was more important was the intellectual atmosphere it maintained. And, believe it or not, at this point Swami Vireswarananda said: 'I am going to recommend you to be the next editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*. Get ready.' My heart leapt with joy. I asked when he wanted me to leave, and he replied, 'As soon as possible.' He dismissed me after giving me some instructions about my journey.

My train journey ended at Tanakpur. I was greatly impressed by the charming

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flora and fauna. As soon as I got off the train, an old man came forward and said: 'I am from Mayavati. I have come to receive you. Hand over your baggage to me. Will you have some tea?' I said no.

Shyamalatal is some miles between Tanakpur and Mayavati. Swami Virajananda had at one time lived there alone, engaging himself in spiritual practices. Now he was President of the Order. Recently a good centre had developed there. He himself was present at the centre at the time I arrived, and so also many of his disciples. His birthday was close at hand, and that was an added attraction. I planned my journey in such a way that I might be present at the centre on the day Swami Virajananda's birthday would be celebrated.

I was very slow climbing the hills. In fact, I was always far behind the coolie, who was an old man and who was also carrying my baggage. He sometimes scolded me for falling behind, and he incidentally disclosed that Swami Virajananda was his guru. He said, 'Even at his present age, my guru can walk faster than you.' The scolding did not help. I was still always falling behind.

We had only a couple of miles to cover when we met a Swami who was about my age. He said he had been sent to receive us, and he carried coffee and snacks. What a hearty welcome! We sat down and refreshed ourselves with the coffee and food. When we arrived at the centre, Swami Virajananda himself saw to it that our needs were well attended to.

The next day was Swami Virajananda's birthday, and the day started off with a sensation. A young girl, barely twenty or so, had spent the whole night in the forest and had now emerged with the daylight. That wild animals had not attacked her was a wonder. Many thought she was not a normal person, but I saw no reason to think so. She was certainly an extraordinary person. She loved her guru, and she wanted by any means to be with her guru on his birthday. There were people who thought Swami Virajananda also might think she was not normal. He was very kind to her, however. He was, in fact, kind to everybody on that day. We had our lunch with him. There were many special items of food that day, and he insisted that we eat more than we usually did. He himself did likewise.

I spent another happy day at the centre. I was struck by the fact that there was no human habitation near by. For decades, Swami Virajananda had lived there alone. He grew whatever he needed to eat, but water was a big problem. The place was known by the name Shyamalatal, 'the dark lake'. The lake was indeed dark, but there was not much water in it. And in summer, the lake would almost dry up. Further, the lake was quite some distance from where Swami Virajananda lived.

For years together he lived alone. It is difficult to imagine how he could eke out his existence. It is said that a young man from a neighbouring village would come now and then and cook a meal for him. Whatever else the Swami needed, he improvised. He had managed to develop a vegetable garden which met his requirements, and he also grew plenty of fruits and flowers. Once he was working in his garden when a tiger began to stalk him. Somebody noticed it and shouted. Then the tiger ran away. Obviously, it was not a man-eater.

What surprised me was the library there at the centre. Swami Virajananda must have been a very studious man, for he had a large collection of books, and they were on every subject on earth. I gave a quick glance at some of them. There was one book which had a fascinating title: *The Man the Trees Loved*. I

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don't remember the author's name, but I remember the story of the book. It was about a man who spent the larger part of the night in the forests. One day his wife found out about this and decided to follow him the next time he went into the forest. When she did, she found to her surprise that the branches of the trees were obstructing her path. Again, sometimes there was a strong wind and the branches of the trees would hit her in the face. Meanwhile, she found that her husband had disappeared. Obviously, the trees hid him somewhere.

After a day or two I left for Mayavati. This time I was not alone. Two Swamis — Swami Kailasananda and Swami Vitashokananda — were with me. Both of them were going there for a short holiday. Swami Kailasananda, aged and feeble, had a horse at his disposal, but Swami Vitashokananda rode it in his place. Swami Kailasananda had difficulty walking, like I did. At one point he stopped and examined his feet. We asked him why he was looking at his feet, and he said that the bottom of his feet were getting flat. And at the rate they were getting flat, he said, they would become totally smooth by the time they reached their destination. 'Would you tell me what made Swamiji go to the West?' he asked. We were taken aback by the question. 'What do you mean?' we replied. He said: 'Because Swamiji went to the West, we became monks, and having become monks we are about to lose our feet and become cripples.'

Thank God, we reached our destination without becoming cripples. Not only that, a couple of miles before our destination, we were met by a couple of monks. As we expected, they were carrying lovely snacks and coffee.

The next day I had a long interview with Swami Pavitrananda, the President of Mayavati. He had always been kind to me, and I had no doubt that he would find a job for me that would suit me best. Imagine my shock when he said I was to look after the cash! I would have begged to be excused, but I remembered Swami Vireswarananda's words: 'Do whatever you are asked to do.' Swami Atmasthananda handed over the cash to me, but I am ashamed to say that my handling of it was not without errors. Luckily, Swami Vandanananda was always at hand, and he would help me. Because of him, I was able to avert major mistakes.

About this time, Swami Pavitrananda wrote a series of articles entitled, 'This is India,' which introduced India to those who knew little or nothing about it. He wrote about people at the grass-roots level. He described religious fairs where thousands of village people assembled, and gave vivid pictures of those people, their ways of life, their religious beliefs, and so on.

Swami Pavitrananda never wasted his time. He was always meditating or reading or writing. What he disliked most was idle gossip. He again and again reminded people what Mayavati was meant for — peace and meditation. The house was made of wood, and each monk had his own cubicle. Unless you were very careful, your footsteps might make an awful noise. The house had formerly been part of a tea estate owned by a retired military officer. Capt. Sevier, a friend of Swami Vivekananda, purchased it to dedicate it as a place where people wishing to practise Vedanta could settle down. Swamiji addressed Mrs. Sevier as 'Mother'. She is now known as Mother Sevier to everybody. Two things were imperative here: Never break a twig off a tree, and maintain silence.

The Himalayas charmed me. Nowhere are the Himalayas as majestic as here. I would often look at the peaks for hours together. Similarly, the silence of the place was bewitching. It was as if a magician had played

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some trick and made everybody go to sleep. I took full advantage of the silence in that I meditated as long as I could. In fact, I did not — or could not — sleep at night at all. I thought I had insomnia. I don't know what it was, but I enjoyed being awake.

As regards work, I must confess I did not enjoy keeping the cash. The fact was that I kept making mistakes, and I became a laughing-stock, at least to myself. But I liked writing reviews of books for our journal, *Prabuddha Bharata*. I sometimes contributed articles also. Some of them were later quoted in other journals.

Once a year the monks went out for a picnic somewhere. All would join the picnic except for one, who would stay back and cook a good meal so that when the hungry monks would come back in the evening, they would relish it. One year Swami Pavitrananda announced that I was to stay back and prepare a good dinner for those who would join the picnic. It was a bolt from the blue! I begged to be excused. I said I had never cooked anything before. Swami Pavitrananda replied: 'So much the better. We want you to cook something new.' At first I was in a dilemma, but then I decided to have a go at something really new. I picked up several vegetables, put them together, and then boiled them. 'Hunger is indeed the best sauce.' Everybody liked it.

Once we had a snowfall for days together, and as a result, we were snow-bound for three weeks. When the snow had at last thawed enough, we went out to inspect the damage it had done. Just as we entered the dispensary [hospital], a tiger jumped out with a big howl. It had been lying comfortably in a box filled with sawdust. Seeing us, it was frightened and ran away. Luckily, it did not attack us.

I was at Mayavati nearly three years. What a happy time it was! Unfortunately, I fainted several times and got cuts from falling down. Though there were no instruments there to check blood pressure, the doctors said my blood pressure was too high for that altitude, and so I had to leave. But my memories of Mayavati are unforgettable. ❐

Old Lohaghat Road

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Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati: My Memoirs

SWAMI ANANYANANDA

Swami Ananyanandaji Maharaj was associated with the Mayavati Advaita Ashrama and its Publication Department in Calcutta for eighteen long years, during different periods in the life of the Ashrama and in various capacities. Quite naturally in the following pages we get a good coverage of the major events for which we are immensely grateful to the learned senior Swami. The reader, we are sure, will immensely enjoy the presentation.

The very mention of Mayavati strikes an emotional chord in my heart: MAYAVATI — what a name to conjure with!

It has been my proud privilege to be associated with the Mayavati Ashrama and its Calcutta Branch (the Publication Department) for eighteen long years, at different periods and in various capacities. These will be narrated later at the appropriate places. This Himalayan Centre at Mayavati completes one hundred years of its glorious existence this year, on 19 March 1999, to be exact. On this memorable occasion, *Prabuddha Bharata* is bringing out a 'Special Number' in January 1999. It is hoped that several other contributors, who were associated with either the Mayavati Ashrama or its Calcutta Branch, will also be writing about their reminiscences in this 'Centenary Special Issue'. The present Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* has asked me to narrate memoirs of my long association with the Ashrama. *Prabuddha Bharata* is one of the oldest English monthly journals still extant in India. The inspiration to start it, way back in 1896 in Chennai (then Madras), came from Swami Vivekananda, who was then tirelessly working in America and England for the spread of Vedanta, as practised and preached by his Great Master, Sri Ramakrishna.

The purpose of this monograph is not to trace the origin, growth and development of this 'Permanent Home' of *Prabuddha Bharata*, shifted from Chennai to Almora first and thence to Mayavati. The founders of this Himalayan Ashrama were Captain J.H. Sevier, his wife Mrs. Charlotte Sevier, and Swami Swarupananda. The very first time Swami Vivekananda met the Seviers at London in private, after they had both listened to only one lecture of the Swami, he addressed Mrs. Sevier as 'Mother' and asked her, 'Would you not like to come to India? I will give you of my best realizations.'[1] From that time onwards, this appellation 'Mother', as referring to Mrs. Sevier, has stuck among the Advaita Ashrama Brotherhood. Where she used to live in Mayavati, after the passing away of Captain Sevier, was and is even now known as 'Mother's Bungalow' — the Mother's winter residence, to be exact. In summer she used to stay in what is now the old guest house. The Kitchen Garden just behind the Mother's Bungalow was named 'Mother Sevier's Kitchen Garden' in the 1980s, when the present writer was the President of the Ashrama.

Swamiji had conceived the idea of an Ashrama in the Himalayas, when he was touring Europe in the company of the Seviers, and went to the Alps in Switzerland. 'It was in the Himalayas of Europe that the Swami spoke to those (the Sevier couple) who were to be the founders of the Advaita Ashrama and dedicated their lives to it, of his cherished dream of establishing a monastery in the heart of his own beloved Himalayas.'[2] It ap-

1 *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western Disciples (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1990), vol. 2, p. 113. [Hereafter, *Life*.]

2. *Life*, vol. 2, p. 117.

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pears, from what I have heard from senior Swamis, that Swamiji had stipulated three conditions for finding a suitable site in the Himalayas, where *Prabuddha Bharata* could have a 'permanent home': first, that the place should be surrounded by a dense forest; second, that it should be between 6,000 ft. and 7,000 ft. above sea level; and third, that it should command a magnificent view of the snow ranges. Mayavati fulfilled all these conditions. The original name of the place was 'Mayapat' in the U.P. Revenue Records. The name 'Mayavati' was given by the Swamis after taking possession of the property. The Mayavati Ashrama is nestled deep in a thick forest of Himalayan deodars, pines, gnarled oaks, rhododendrons, and other wild ferns, shrubs, plants and tall trees that can grow only at that altitude of 6,400 ft. The Ashrama commands a breath-taking view of the long snow ranges of the Himalayas towards the north. Prior to when the Seviers took possession of the property with a few buildings on it, 'Mayapat' was a tea estate owned by a Scottish retired army officer. How it changed hands is an interesting story.

Even now there are hundreds of tea plants all over the place, practically neglected and exposed to the elements. The previous owner was eager to sell the property and go back home. The hand of destiny guided the Seviers and Swami Swarupananda — the first President of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati — to this present site. Then and there, the deal was struck and possession was taken by the new owners. A few more buildings were added in due course. At long last, Swamiji's 'cherished dream' became a reality; and it completes one hundred years this year. Mayavati is the only other Ashrama that Swamiji visited, apart from the Belur Math, though under unfortunate circumstances of sadness at heart and sympathy for 'Mother', as Captain Sevier had passed away in October 1900. He visited Mayavati in the wintry days of January 1901, when it is usually snow-bound, to console 'Mother' Sevier, after the 'martyrdom' of Captain Sevier to the Swami's cause. He stayed for a fortnight on this only visit. Mother Sevier was a brave woman and totally dedicated to Vedanta and to her guru. When Captain Sevier passed away, he was, as desired by himself, cremated *a la* Hindu on the bank of a rivulet, which takes its origin in the Mayavati gorge; and, it was Mother Sevier's wish that no memorial should be built on that spot. She was strong-willed and calm, and continued her stay in Mayavati, helping the monastic brothers in conducting the journal and personally looking after the landed property.

My First Posting to Mayavati (1948–1951)

Let me resort to the first person in recording my personal memoirs from now on. I had the rare privilege of being posted to Mayavati three times in various capacities, and once to the Calcutta Branch, all within three decades. The first posting to Mayavati in 1948 was to look after the office and maintain cash and accounts of the Ashrama.

It is amusing to observe that each time I was posted to Mayavati, my predecessor was not present there to hand over his charge to me! In 1948, there was no motorable road to Lohaghat — the sub-divisional town nearest to Mayavati — and beyond. So, I had to trek the entire distance of about 50 kms. from Tanakpur in three stages, halting at two places *en route*. The bridle path I took was the same old path leading to Mt. Kailas and Manasarovar from Tanakpur at the foothills of the Himalayas. The Mayavati Swamis had earlier written to me to carry some vegetables with me. So, I had a small luggage of books, a bed roll, and the vegetables meant for Mayavati. On the day I reached Tanakpur by train from Bareilly, I was received at the station by a pony owner with a letter from Mayavati.

Around 3 p.m. we started trekking up to my first halting place, our own Ashrama at Shyamalatal. It is about 10 miles from Tanakpur and took us nearly six hours to climb up the first range of the Himalayas. We reached

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the Ashrama around 9 p.m. That night, and the next day and night I stayed there. That Ashrama was and still is sacred to me because my guru built it with his own hands, taking the help of some local workers. He spent a number of years there in intense *tapasyā* and austerities, all alone. In 1938, he became the General President of the Ramakrishna Order and was succeeded at Shyamalatal by a sweet-natured and affectionate Swami. It was in Shyamalatal that the key to the iron safe at Mayavati was handed over to me by my predecessor! He was awaiting my arrival there for handing over the key to me.

On the day I left Shyamalatal, I had the blessings of the Swami there around 4.00 a.m. and resumed my journey with the pony carrying the luggage, and the owner of the pony. We came down by about 2,000 ft. reaching around 7 a.m. a place called Chalti, where a river by that very name flows to join the River Sarada farther below. It was the month of May. Chalti was quite warm and infested with flies! The wayside tea shops and eating houses were dirty and in an insanitary condition. We had some hot tea and two hot *phulkas* (unleavened bread) each, and resumed our trekking. This part of the journey was quite tiring. My intention was to reach Deuri Dak Bungalow (where Swami Vivekananda had stopped for a night on his way back from Mayavati to Pilibhit in 1901). Around 12 noon, we reached it after climbing up 4,000 ft. along a zig-zag bridle path. I was so exhausted that I gave the pony man some money to purchase provisions and to prepare a one-item meal and slept like a log of wood for three hours! At about 3 p.m. I got up, washed myself, and we ate the meal that was ready. The pony, too, had its share of fodder and grains which its owner had brought. The next stage of the journey, about 10 miles away, was smooth, not much climbing up and down. It was almost level walking. At about 10 p.m., we reached a place called Bonlekh. There was a wayside tea shop owned by a former cook of the Mayavati Ashrama. He received us cordially and gave us freshly made *phulkas*, some sweets and hot tea.

The third stage of the journey started at 4 a.m. the next morning. It meant quite a bit of climbing up to reach a place called Dharamgarh, which overlooks the entire Mayavati Estate. Two senior Swamis from Mayavati had come with some home-made refreshments. All of us sat there for a while and ate the items brought from Mayavati. I was told then that Swamiji, during his visit to Mayavati in 1901, had visited this spot and liked it very much. From Dharamgarh, one can see the snow ranges of the Himalayas — from east to west, about 200 miles long. For the first time, I could have the *darśana* of the blessed Mayavati Ashrama, against the background of the snow ranges, and the surrounding dense forest. Around 9 a.m., we reached my destination, quite happy at heart, although very exhausted.

The office work, including maintaining cash and accounts, was not very heavy. I had plenty of time at my disposal to read a lot for several hours in the day. At times, I would go out all alone with a stick in hand, which is a *must* for every member in the Ashrama, towards the shady mound opposite to the Ashrama and above and beyond the Editor's bungalow for a couple of hours. It was my favourite haunt. I don't think I left out even a single square foot of that mound untrodden by me, except where huge trees stood, which, if they are still standing, have been witness to the growth of the Mayavati Ashrama all these one hundred years. An important item of work of the monk-in-charge of the office is to maintain the diary of the Ashrama activities. One notable feature of the diary is that the keeper has to record the maximum and minimum temperatures of the previous day, before proceeding to write down other details. Perhaps, Mayavati is the only Ashrama of the Ramakrishna Order which has maintained a diary of its day-to-day activities, ever since its inception.

When I came to know that the diaries of

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the earlier years were preserved in a particular almirah, I became curious to know about the visit of Swami Vivekananda in the winter of 1901. I searched for the diary of 1901 and opened the page for 3 January of that year. I was hoping to read a very detailed, enthusiastic, and effusive account of his arrival at Mayavati, his first and only visit to this Ashrama, which was his 'cherished dream'. But I was sadly disappointed to read only a brief sentence, stating that he had arrived at the Ashrama, soon after midday. For a fortnight, he stayed at Mayavati. Most of the days, it was snowing. On two or three clear days, he went to Mother Sevier to have tea with her and console her. Another day, he went to the 'Lake Garden', where there were two lakes, one above the other, till the 1960s. Swamiji was so charmed by the two lakes that he remarked: 'In the latter part of my life, I shall give up all my public work and pass my days in writing books and whistling merry tunes by this lake, free as a child!'[3] Alas! That was not to be. The very next year, on 4 July 1902, he entered *mahāsamādhi* at the Belur Math. He was not even 40. The mortal remains of that great soul were cremated at the very spot where his temple stands today at the Belur Math.

As I mentioned earlier, Swamiji visited the Dharamgarh range (7,000 ft.) one day. From there, one can get a grand view of the snow range — some two hundred miles long — towards the north. He was 'so pleased with the spot and its grand view that he wished to have a hermitage built there, where he could meditate in solitude, undisturbed'.[4] January 13 was Swamiji's birthday — his thirty-ninth. It was a rainy day, but he was feeling better. The Swami would have seen the place where Captain Sevier was cremated on the bank of the Mayavati rivulet, when he was coming to Mayavati from the Almora side on 3 January 1901. Finally, he left the place on 18 January for Tanakpur and Pilibhit, which was the railhead in those days. He spent the first night at Champawat in the Dak Bungalow there; the second night, at Deuri Dak Bungalow, to which reference has already been made. The two lakes are no longer in existence. Later, when a motorable road connecting Lohaghat with Mayavati was being laid by the P.W.D. of the U.P. Government in the 1960s, the engineers advised that the water in the lakes should be drained off, as they would affect the road below through seepage. The then President decided to follow their advice.

In 1948–1949 I had the pleasure of boating in the lakes — not exactly a boat — but a few wooden sleepers tied together to float on water. From one end to the other end of the lake I was rowing that float a couple of times! After draining off the water from the lakes, that area is being used to cultivate grains like barley, wheat, etc. Thereafter, surrounding the lake areas, on the bunds, apple saplings were planted. They would have grown into big trees by now yielding fruits, after more than three decades. In the 1980s that whole area, including the new cowshed, was surrounded by a 4 ft. high stone wall and rechristened 'Swarupananda Orchard'.

In the same year I went to Mayavati (May 1948), another monastic member was sent to Mayavati by the Headquarters to assist the *Prabuddha Bharata* Editor. He was a Brahmacharin at that time, by name Turiyachaitanya. (Now he is a full-fledged monk, Swami Mukhyananda by name, and I use this name in the narrative that follows.) He and I were both in Karachi before the partition of India. The Head of the Karachi Mission was Swami Ranganathananda. Swami Mukhyananda and myself are contemporaries, having stepped into 80 last year. Both of us came into contact with Swami Ranganathananda in Bangalore in the 1930s. We were happy to be together in Karachi and then again in Mayavati. I returned to India from Karachi in October 1947, soon after the partition, as required by the Headquarters, which had

3. *Life*, vol. 2, p. 571.
4. *Life*, vol. 2, p. 571.

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started a 'Refugee Relief Camp for the Punjabis' (non-Muslims), who were forced to leave their hearth and home, as agreed to between the governments of India and Pakistan — complete exchange of population of Muslims going to West Punjab and non-Muslims migrating to India. It was a massive relief operation in Kurukshetra (Haryana) never before undertaken by the Mission on such a scale. I was one of the dozen or so monks who served the refugees for about 8 months. Swami Mukhyananda stayed on in Karachi till the last day, when the Centre was wound up at the behest of the Headquarters. He was posted to Mayavati and arrived there in August 1948. Even he had to trek the whole distance from Tanakpur to Mayavati, by the same route that I had taken earlier. He settled down to his new work, as assistant to the Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* a couple of days later.

The next year, in 1949, both of us found that the library at Mayavati and the catalogues in three languages — English, Bengali and Hindi — were in a sad and confusing state of affairs. We approached the President to allow us to reorganize the entire library. He was quite sympathetic to the proposal and extended all help to us, morally and financially. Since Turiyachaitanya was looking after the library at Karachi, he had some experience in classification of books. We adopted a simple system of classification, since it is not a lending library, but meant only for the inmates of the Ashrama. He would classify the books and I wrote the catalogues in all the three languages; the total number of books may have been more than 6,000, all the languages put together. The late Swami Madhavananda, then General Secretary of the Order, had taken a year's leave from his arduous work, and come to Mayavati to spend some months that year. Earlier (1918–1927), he was President of the Mayavati Ashrama.

One unfortunate experience during my first posting to Mayavati was an encounter with a bear! Fortunately, I was not alone. There was an employee of the Ashrama, who was a good marksman. One winter afternoon (maybe 1948–1949 winter) around 3 p.m., he came to my room and asked me if I wished to accompany him for big game. I was thrilled at the prospect and gave my assent. Mayavati possessed a double barrel gun. When he called me, I thought it was a good adventure in the forest, with no fear, as the gun was in the hands of an experienced hunter. Both of us reached the Dharamgarh range from the opposite side, that is, via the Mayavati river in the gorge below, and climbing up through the thick jungle. As we were approaching the Dharamgarh spot, lo and behold! my companion saw a big bear coming up the hill. He told me not to make any sound. In fact, this caution was not necessary at all! As soon as I beheld the bear, I stood there stunned and speechless! He, however, took the correct aim at the bear and shot at it, being experienced in such daring acts. The bear rolled down the hill, having been shot at a vital point. It was a female bear with its two cubs. The game law requires that one who shoots an animal must shoot to kill it. It should not be left wounded. Following that law, which I was not aware of, he went down the hill near where the bear was lying and shot another cartridge to make sure that it was really dead. Then he signalled me to go down to the spot where he, and the dead and profusely bleeding bear were. I had regained my mental composure by that time. Picking up some courage, I went down the hill to the spot. The second shot had also hit one of the cubs. It was also dead. The other cub was running away from us. I made bold and ran after it. It was just like a puppy! Got hold of it. Took it in my arms. It started scratching my arms and body. I took out my *chaddar* and wrapped it round nicely with thick pads for its nails, leaving its face to breathe, and took it to the Ashrama in the evening.

That day, my hunter companion, it seemed, was lucky! As we were returning to the Ashrama, with the bear cub in my arms,

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he spotted a barking deer at a little distance and shot at it. The shot hit it, and the animal collapsed on the very spot. He went down the hill to carry the deer back to the Ashrama. As the other Ashrama employees had heard the report of the shot, they became curious to know what had happened, not far from the Ashrama. A couple of employees came to the spot where the dead deer was lying. All of them carried it to the Ashrama. I carried the bear cub to the Ashrama and gave it to the Manager Swami for being taken care of. He was kind enough to give it milk and bananas immediately. I told him the whole story, how I got it. He kept it in a separate room and started giving it milk and fruits. During the day, it used to be tied to a post outside, so that it could have the benefit of sunshine. It survived three days and nights with what food we gave it. On the fourth day, however, for want of nourishment from its own mother's milk, it too died. When the bear cub died, it was a sad spectacle for all of us.

The *paharis* (hill people) are non-vegetarians — all castes included — Brahmin, Kshatriyas, S.C.s, S.T.s, and others. It is a strange fact that the question of caste or class distinction gets obliterated if the food is non-vegetarian, particularly when it is deer's flesh, called venison! As soon as the dead deer was brought to the Ashrama premises, all the employees gathered round it to start the next operation, of skinning it and removing the entrails. The meat that was gathered from it had to be distributed among all the employees of the Ashrama. I was not interested in it.

The news that a bear had been killed in the Mayavati forest reached Lohaghat by the evening! The next day, the cobbler of Lohaghat came to Mayavati to enquire about the spot where the bear was killed. He was directed to the exact spot where the bear lay dead. He left for that place with all the necessary implements to operate on it, to separate the hide of the dead bear. He was asked to give the bear skin to the Ashrama and to dispose of its flesh, etc. as he wished. He informed us that there was a class of people in the hills who consumed with relish the flesh of bears! Distributing the flesh of the bear to those people, he brought the bear skin to the Ashrama, untanned, all the hair intact outside, but awfully smelling of decomposed rotten flesh inside. In due course, even that smell disappeared by exposing it to the sun daily for a number of days. It was then consigned to the lumber room. About a year later, one Sikh gentleman, holding a high office in the Government of India in Delhi, and his wife visited Mayavati, as guests. In the course of our conversation, the subject of the bear skin cropped up. He expressed a wish to have it for himself and said that he would get it tanned properly to remove the awful smell. He would use it in his drawing room at Delhi. It was given to him as a gift. That was the end of the bear story, as far as Mayavati is concerned. The bear skin of the Mayavati forest adorned the drawing room of a highly placed Government of India official at Delhi!

The very first winter I had to encounter was in 1948. Winter begins by the middle of November and goes on up to the following February or March. The 1948–1949 winter was particularly severe. There was thirty inches of snow fall (2½ feet)! For me, it was a new but an exciting and exhilarating experience. Mercury dipped to minus 6°F in the thermometer. It was a sight for gods to see! All over the area, it was covered with thick snow — white, white, white, sheets of snow everywhere — on house tops, on the trees in the forest, on the terraces meant for cultivation! It was an unforgettable experience for me! It is strange but true that flowing water does not freeze! So, we had to keep one tap open for the water to flow out continuously. Otherwise, the pipe might burst.

On the open ground to the left of the main Ashrama building, where we had a badminton court (I do not know if it is still existing and the inmates play the game), there was thirty inches of snow. It was irresistible. I put on necessary clothes, woollen caps, com-

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forter, socks, gumboots, and woollen gloves for the hands, and went out to make snowballs. As one rolls a handful of snow, it gathers fresh snow and grows in size. That, perhaps, is the reason why the expression 'snowballing' is included in the English language. When it became a huge ball, I could not roll it anymore, single-handed. I called one of our house boys to help me in rolling the snowball, until it became a huge ball of about 10 ft. in circumference. It was then rolled to a corner where very little sunshine falls. Then another smaller snowball of the size bigger than a human head was made and placed on top of the bigger one, which was considered to be the trunk of the snowman! The smaller one was its head, from which I carved out the eyes, the nose, the mouth, etc. and put red and blue ink in them to distinguish the different organs. When the snow season was over by the middle of March, this 'snowman' was still there, as the warmth of the season was not sufficient to melt it away soon. It was there till April–May, when the atmospheric temperature gradually increased and the 'snowman' disappeared completely!

On the roof of the Ashrama, as elsewhere on other buildings, the snow gathered there begins to thaw, and slowly, slabs of snow, about 10 to 12 inches thick, glide down the slated roof. When the gliding snow slab reaches the end of the roof, it falls to the ground below, about 20 ft., making a big 'thud' sound! Though I heard the sound a couple of times, it never occurred to me that the sound could be from the falling slabs of snow. As the sound continued at frequent intervals, curiosity compelled me to come out of my cosy and sheltered room to know what it was all about! Once out of the room well clad and protected against the cold, I saw the beautiful spectacle of the slabs of snow falling from the roof, when the weight of the overhang was greater than it could support. Another sight that caught my attention was the icicles that were hanging from the roof. As the snow melts, water drops form from that and they also flow down the roof. While flowing down, they get frozen because of the freezing temperature outside. They form long sticks of ice tapering at the falling end! Then I ventured out into the front garden to see the only tap meant for watering the flower plants in the summer season. What a sight it was! From the mouth of the tap to the ground below, there was one long stick of ice about three feet tapering towards the ground. I just broke it at the mouth of the tap and carried the ice stick to the building to show it to other brothers, and kept it in one corner to melt away slowly by itself.

Mohanlal Shah Choudhury

No account of Mayavati Ashrama will be complete without mentioning Shahji, a unique personality. His full name was Mohanlal Shah Choudhury. He was called 'Shahji' by the Mayavati Brotherhood. His association with Mayavati was for more than 40 years from its very inception. As a lad of 8 or 10 years in Almora, he caught the attention of Swami Swarupananda, when the latter was shifting the *Prabuddha Bharata* office to Mayavati from Almora. Young Mohan was playing marbles in the streets of Almora with his friends. Watching him, the Swami asked Mohan whether he would accompany him to Mayavati, about 80 kms. away to the south-east by the bridle path. Without the least hesitation, young Mohan consented. The Swami told him to go home and seek the permission of his parents. The reply he gave to the Swami was typical of a hill boy! 'What is there to ask for permission? I have decided to go with you.' Still the Swami persuaded Mohan to go home and at least 'inform' his parents that he was following the Swami to Mayavati. This, of course, he did. He came to Mayavati in 1898 with Swami Swarupananda. With the help of Swami Swarupananda and others of the Mayavati Brotherhood, he learnt Hindi well and the English alphabet sufficient to compose the matter for *Prabuddha Bharata*. His wish was to stay on in Mayavati till the end of his life. He was not inclined to marry either

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and remained single. Though he was not formally initiated by Swami Swarupananda, Shahji looked upon and respected the Swami as his guru.

Shahji had an elder brother. He was a teacher in the hills. When he retired from service, he came and settled down in Lohaghat. He was a married man, but had no issues. He and his wife were getting old. They requested Shahji to go and stay with them in Lohaghat. At first, Shahji was reluctant to leave Mayavati. Later on, the Swamis at Mayavati prevailed upon him to comply with his brother's request. Most unwillingly, he shifted himself to his brother's house at Lohaghat. He had stayed in Mayavati for nearly forty years. He would have continued to be there till the end of his life, but for his elder brother and the latter's wife. The room he was occupying in Mayavati, while he was working in composing and printing *Prabuddha Bharata*, was known as 'Shahji's room'; now perhaps used as a godown. Shahji was an institution himself! Very humble, completely self-effaced, he adapted himself to the life and work at Mayavati. He learnt Bengali even, and was very dear to one and all at the Ashrama. He was present when Swami Vivekananda visited Mayavati in January 1901. He used to narrate to us very many interesting anecdotes of the early life of the Mayavati Ashrama.

In the beginning, Mayavati Ashrama was established for the sole purpose of printing *Prabuddha Bharata*. Later, however, when Swami Virajananda became the Second President, after the passing away of Swami Swarupananda in 1906, the former collected a lot of material for writing the biography of Swami Vivekananda. In this task, he was helped by Mother Sevier and another Western gentleman, F.J. Alexander, who spent some years in Mayavati. Thus came into being *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western disciples, in four bulky volumes, printed on thick paper. Nowadays, the same title is available in two volumes, printed on thin paper, including a lot of fresh material added and made up to date (brought out in 1980s). Also, four volumes of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, from the material garnered from *Brahmavadin* and *Prabuddha Bharata*, both started earlier in Chennai, under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda himself, were published by the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. Both *The Life* and *The Complete Works* were printed by Mohanlal Shah Choudhury from the *Prabuddha Bharata* Press at Mayavati. The format of *The Complete Works* was different in those days from the one we have at present. Now, they are in nine volumes, under the sub-title 'Mayavati Memorial Edition', though printed and published from the Calcutta Branch of the Mayavati Ashrama. Swami Swarupananda had translated the *Bhagavad-Gītā* into English, with the original text, word-for-word translation, purport of the verses, and notes based on Śrī Śaṅkara's commentary. Its first edition was also published at Mayavati.

The Calcutta Branch

Information regarding the Calcutta Branch (Publication Department) of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, may not be out of place here. About the year 1920, an enterprising young Swami of Mayavati, with foresight, took it into his head to shift the publication of the books-section from Mayavati to Calcutta. He came to Calcutta and hired a small shop in the busy central part of the metropolis, where many book-sellers and publishers had their own stalls to sell their respective publications. This Swami had brought with him books printed in Mayavati and started selling them. The response was encouraging. Compared to the Calcutta publishers, who had adopted advanced technology in printing, Mayavati publications were primitive, to say the least, but the subjects dealt with in them were invaluable. Gradually, the Swami rented a house nearby, where two or three other monks joined him in this endeavour. Slowly, the business looked up; it was promising! They were encouraged by the prospects

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of this new venture. Later, they rented a bigger house not far from their shop. They started printing books in Calcutta itself, with the advanced printing technology. Some years later, they could buy and own that house, whereto they shifted their shop also. Many new titles were added, apart from *The Life* and *The Complete Works*. Several scriptural texts were translated into English by eminent Swamis. Like the mythological 'Manu's fish', it began to grow in size and volume! The office was well organized and the business picked up, mainly by postal service and railway parcels.

Towards the end of 1950s, a class friend of Swami Vivekananda made a gift of a land and building at 5, Dehi Entally Road, Calcutta 700 014. The old building was demolished, and in its place a new multi-storied building with all the facilities for conducting the business, with an office, a show-room, a big godown for stocking printing paper, unbound copies of books, bound copies of several titles in the ground floor; with added activities of a Library and Reading Room for the public and a lecture hall for holding religious discourse, in the first floor; a dining hall, kitchen, storeroom for provisions, living rooms for monastic workers in the second and third floors, came up in 1961. It was a sheer coincidence that this new building of the Calcutta Branch was also inaugurated on 19 March 1961, the same date on which the Mayavati Ashrama was started in 1899! At present, the Calcutta Branch is flourishing with its roaring business, with new titles being issued every year. It is spreading the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and Vedanta literature all over the world. Recently, it has also resorted to the latest mode of composing by computers. From the letter press at Mayavati, manually operated, to computer composing and adopting the most advanced mode of printing, what a huge leap forward in one hundred years! Although the books and *Prabuddha Bharata* are printed and published by the Calcutta Branch, they are all published (except *Prabuddha Bharata*) in the name of the President, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, even today. I understand that even this multi-storied building has proved to be insufficient for its ever-increasing business. Several President and Manager Swamis have contributed their mite to this phenomenal growth of the Calcutta Branch. At this juncture, we must remember Shahji's devotion to duty, self-sacrificing spirit, silent and steady work, and unassuming nature, at the beginning of the Mayavati Ashrama, which laid the foundation of this grand and glorious success of the Calcutta Branch, not forgetting that young enterprising Swami, who took the bold step of bringing the publication department to Calcutta.

When I went to Mayavati for the first time, Shahji had already moved to Lohaghat. However, he used to walk up to Mayavati every *Ekādaśī* day for the evening *Śrī Rāmanāma Saṅkīrtana*. We were told that when Swami Saradananda, the then General Secretary of the Order visited Mayavati, one *Ekādaśī* intervened. He asked the resident monastic brothers (in the early 1920s), if there would be the singing of *Śrī Rāmanāma Saṅkīrtana* in the evening. The reply he got was in the negative. It was then that he suggested that it could be sung in chorus on every *Ekādaśī* day, as is done in all the centres of the Order, but not in front of any picture or portrait of Sri Rama, in deference to the sentiments of Swami Vivekananda. Since then, it has been sung in chorus on *Ekādaśī* days, when all the monastic members and guests (if any) congregate in the main hall called 'Golkamara' to sing. Shahji knew how to play on the *tabla*. It was his prerogative to accompany the singers on the *tabla*, while one of the monastic members would play and lead the others on the harmonium.

No night class on *Ekādaśī* days. Shahji was very fond of playing 'Ludo', a kind of children's indoor game. It is almost like dice, but played with only one dice. Winning a game depends upon the clever movement of

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the counters, and more on chance! Once, it so happened that *Ekādaśī* fell on 31 December (I forget the year). In those days, I used to keep awake till after midnight to ring out the old and to ring in the New Year. Shahji and myself started playing 'Ludo' around 10 p.m., after dinner. Almost every game, I was winning. It was about 12 midnight. I won the last game also. Then, I suggested to Shahji that we stop playing any more. He would not listen to me! He told me, 'You cannot get away after winning! Sit down and play one more game.' In this last game, I intentionally made some wrong moves of the coins, and Shahji won the game! He then said gleefully to me, 'Now, you can go and have a good sleep!' I was more concerned with Shahji getting sound sleep! Sometimes, he would get nightmares if he lost! I was much younger to him. In any case, I would have slept well.

One more incident connected with Shahji and then I close this topic, though numerous episodes crowd in. I have already stated that Mayavati Ashrama possessed a double-barrel gun. With the permission of the Manager Swami under whose custody the gun was kept under lock and key, Shahji took the gun and went out one evening into the Mayavati forest in search of a wild cock, which *paharis* cook and eat. After wandering in vain for a couple of hours, he was returning to the Ashrama, disappointed and frustrated. As he was nearing the Ashrama down the 'Shetty Field' (christened 'Vivekananda Farm' in the 1980s, and now surrounded by a wall and used for cultivation of potato and wheat), suddenly he heard some rustling noise. Assuming it to be made by a cock or an animal, Shahji got ready, took aim, and shot the gun in the direction from where the rustling sound had come, exclaiming, 'Ah, at long last, I have got it!' When he approached the spot, he was mortally shocked and stunned to discover that it was neither a cock nor an animal, but the Ashrama cowboy who was returning to the cowshed (which was situated there at that time), after delivering the evening milk to the Swami in charge of the cowshed. Fortunately, the bullet had only grazed his leg, with a mild abrasion. He was taken to the hospital immediately (Mayavati Ashrama conducts a charitable hospital within its precincts to serve the local people) and dressed up. He recovered quickly. Then and there, Shahji took a vow never to handle a gun any more. I heard about this episode form his own lips, from the 'horse's mouth', as they say!

I should close this part of Shahji's story, by telling the readers what I heard later of his sad end, when I was posted to Mayavati as President in 1978. Early in the 1970s when Swami Budhananda was the President, news reached Mayavati that Shahji had passed away quietly at Lohaghat. In order to fulfil the heart's wish of Shahji that he would end his life in Mayavati and be cremated in its sacred precincts, near about where Captain Sevier had been cremated about 70 years back on the bank of the Mayavati rivulet, in the gorge below, his mortal remains were brought from Lohaghat to Mayavati and, after all the formal rituals were observed, consigned to the raging flames amidst Vedic chanting by the Mayavati Brotherhood. That was the glorious end of an exemplary life, dedicated to the work of Mayavati Ashrama.

My Second Posting to Mayavati (1958–1962)

The second time I was posted to Mayavati was in 1958. This time to edit *Prabuddha Bharata*. From 1951 to 1958, I had worked on *The Cultural Heritage of India* (first four volumes) at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture (in its old building at 111, Russa Road, Calcutta). That work gave me the opportunity to master the technique of editing work. The authorities thought that I was competent enough to undertake this new job and so posted me to Mayavati. There were many pleasant and some unpleasant experiences for me about this time. The pleasant ones I cherish for the rest of my life. The unpleasant ones are best forgiven and forgot-

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ten. There is no use ruminating over them. They taught good lessons to me. For facilitating administration in the conduct of the journal, the President of the Ashrama was designated the Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, and the Swami who actually worked for it from A to Z was to be known as the Joint Editor. This practice continued till recently. A few years back, the old system was restored. As of now, the President is the Managing Editor, and the Swami who works for *Prabuddha Bharata* is the Editor.

The second time I was posted to Mayavati, my predecessor had left Mayavati without the knowledge of the President! I reached Mayavati this time by a motorable road that had been laid up to Lohaghat and beyond. I had to climb up about 6 kms. from Lohaghat to Mayavati. After a day's rest, I went to the Editor's room. Fortunately, the assistant to the previous Editor was there to show me all the details of the work. In a few days, I took up the job seriously and settled down to work. My main work was to go through the articles contributed to *Prabuddha Bharata* by others and make them ready for the press, write an editorial myself every month, correspond with prospective contributors of articles and reviewers of books, sometimes reviewing myself a book or two if the need arose, and such other types of work.

We had to work two months in advance, to wit, if the January issue has to appear on time, myself and my colleague, who used to type out articles with a 'copy', would despatch about 80 pages of foolscap size paper typed matter by Registered Post to the Calcutta Branch in the first week of the previous November itself. There was a City Editor in the Calcutta Branch to deal with the press. The press would take about three weeks to compose the matter in single column, in the midst of other pressing work of the press, and give the 'galley proof' to the City Editor, who would send it to Mayavati by the first week of December. As soon as it arrived, both my colleague and myself would sit up for 'copy-holding', to see whether any matter from the original manuscript had been omitted by the press by oversight, then divide the entire 'galley proof' into two halves — one half to be read by me and the other half by my colleague. After a couple of days, the two of us would exchange our halves to go through them intently. Thus, the 'galley proof' would have the benefit of having been read thrice. In another two days, the 'galley proof' would be ready for despatch to Calcutta. It was the job of the City Editor to proceed with the page make-up of the matter and add some reviews, news, notices, reports, etc., which used to be with him always and thus complete 40 pages of reading matter for any month. The January issue is a 'Special Number' with some illustrated articles, and has 80 pages of reading matter. The December issue would contain an Index to all the articles published during the year, both author-wise and subject-wise. This is all as far as the journal is concerned.

As for our living, I was staying in the *Prabuddha Bharata* building. My colleague was living in the main Ashrama building. In the rainy season, it just pours at Mayavati, sometimes for 3 or 4 days at a stretch, without any let-up. We had to use gumboots to move about from one building to another. Apart from the rains, in that season leeches abound all over the place! They hibernate for 8 to 9 months in a year and suddenly surface during the rainy season. In winter, if there was heavy snow fall, I used to shift my office to the main building, to the 'Gol Kamara', where there is a fire-place and carry on the work there. Electricity had not arrived at Mayavati then. It came only in the latter part of the 1960s. Now, I understand, they have electric heaters and other gadgets to keep themselves and the rooms warm, cosy and comfortable. Not in our days. We had to resort to the old custom of keeping fire in a metallic tray, with live cinders covered with ashes to warm our hands, which would become benumbed, and to keep the room a little warm. Really, those were hard days. Fortunately, the brain and

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the blood in the body do not freeze!

The Editor's job was quite exacting. By way of some diversion to this daily work, I took to a hobby, which was very interesting. I used to get relaxed also. It was bee-keeping. I read a couple of books on bee-keeping. About half a dozen bee-colonies were also kept in different places of the Ashrama, and I kept one colony very near my living room. Between April and June, known as *'madhumāsa'*, once my joy knew no bounds when I extracted 9 kgs. of honey from only two colonies! If I go into details of bee-keeping, it may be boring to the readers. So I refrain. For me, it was a welcome and very interesting hobby, useful to all the brothers to make their tongues sweet!

During my Editorship, we had the very stimulating company of Swami Ranganathananda. Some of his admirers had brought him all the way from Delhi to Mayavati in a van. In the evenings we used to go for a long walk with him. His conversations were always educative, instructive and profoundly interesting. In fact, one of the conversations I had with him during his visit provided sufficient material for an editorial subsequently. After about a week or so, he left for Delhi by the same van.

The Visit of Swami Prabhavananda and Party

Another unforgettable episode of this period was the visit to Mayavati by Swami Prabhavananda, who was the Head of our Hollywood Centre, U.S.A., along with five American women disciples of his, who had renounced the world and embraced monastic life. Those were the first American women *sannyāsinīs* of the Order. They have their own centre in Santa Barbara, under the guidance of the Hollywood Centre. Along with them came Swami Nirvanananda. The two Swamis were intimate friends. Several other Swamis also had come during that period. We had a 'House Full' of monastics! The five *sannyāsinīs* were put up in the guest house. For all their meals — breakfast, lunch, afternoon snacks and tea, and dinner at night — they had to come up to the Ashrama, a distance of about half a kilometre (300 ft.), from the guest house: coming up and going down four times a day! It was the autumn of 1959, if I remember right.

The whole party arrived at Lohaghat in the evening in two cars. Mayavati Ashrama had reserved the entire Dak Bungalow there for them for one night. As the Manager Swami was busy in the Ashrama to receive the guests next morning, the task of receiving the party at Lohaghat was assigned to me. Some two or three employees of Mayavati accompanied me to Lohaghat to receive the honoured guests and make the necessary arrangements for their dinner at night, the required number of beds for all, breakfast next morning, a riding pony for Swami Nirvanananda, and a *dandi* for Swami Prabhavananda. The rest of the party would trek up to Mayavati. The motorable road to Mayavati from Lohaghat was not ready even then. After dinner, they all retired for the night. The Sub-Collector of Lohaghat was of great help in this regard.

Next morning, after breakfast, around 9 a.m., the party left Lohaghat Dak Bungalow, leaving the two cars under the care of the Sub-Collector, and reached Mayavati at about 11 a.m. The nuns were shown the guest house, where they would be putting up during their sojourn, and the rest of us reached the Ashrama. The Swamis were served hot coffee or tea with some snacks. The same arrangement was made in the guest house for the nuns. Since the names of the five *sannyāsinīs* ended with the word *'prāṇā'*, we referred to them as *pañcaprāṇās*, in their absence, of course! That evening, there was no outing or sight-seeing.

From the next morning, the sight-seeing programme started. Again, a *dandi* and a riding pony were hired for the two Swamis. The rest would trek up and down, as the case may be. The task of taking them round to various places worth visiting was entrusted to me by

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the then President, Swami Gambhirananda, as the Manager Swami would be busy in the preparation of lunch, etc. for so many guests and resident monastics. In two or three days, the sight-seeing was over. One night, after dinner, Swami Prabhavananda narrated his own reminiscences of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna with whom he had come in contact in his early monastic life. It was a very moving narration, and he himself became emotional remembering those good old days. The day we visited Dharamgarh, we had 'high tea' on the spot, where Swami Vivekananda had said that he would like to have a hermitage built for him to meditate without any disturbance. That, of course, did not happen, as he entered *mahāsamādhi* the very next year.

During their stay in Mayavati, a group photo was taken with the main Ashrama building as the background. All the senior Swamis were seated on chairs, junior Swamis were standing on either side of the front row of the senior Swamis, and at the back of the front row stood all the five *sannyāsinīs*. One afternoon, the *pañcaprāṇās* pleaded with the President Swami to allow them to have their tea and snacks with all the Swamis in the dining hall. He complied with their earnest plea. So, one afternoon, all of us had tea and snacks in the dining hall. A couple of days later, they left for Lohaghat, where their cars were parked under the supervision of the Sub-Collector at the Dak Bungalow. They were seen off by some of us for the next destination, Delhi, I believe. It was a memorable occasion both for the hosts and the guests.

One very interesting episode I should mention in my editorial work. The word 'glorious' has a 'u' before the last letter 's'. When the first manuscript of an article for a certain month was despatched to Calcutta, I had very carefully inserted that 'u' in the word. The Calcutta City Editor, while casually going through the manuscript before giving it to the press, deleted that letter 'u', thinking that it was an error! About two weeks later, when the 'galley proof' came and we were copy-holding, I restored that letter 'u' in the proper place. When the 'galley proof' was despatched to Calcutta for making-up the page, the City Editor deleted that letter 'u' once again! When the final printed copy of *Prabuddha Bharata* came to Mayavati, I noticed that the letter 'u' was missing! I wrote to him saying that when that letter was inserted twice by me, he should have doubted and consulted the dictionary to know the exact spelling of that word. The reply he wrote was very amusing, saying that he had no doubt at all and hence had deleted the letter! In this connection, I recall the wise advice given to me by Swami Madhavananda. He had said, for the Editor, the dictionary should be like the *Gītā*. Whenever any doubt occurs, consult the dictionary. It should always be at hand on the table. Even today, though I am no longer connected with any editorial work, the dictionary occupies its important place on the table. Later, when that City Editor came to Mayavati to help me in the Editor's work, I showed him the dictionary and told him about the valuable advice given to me by Swami Madhavananda. He owned up his mistake and felt sorry. I told him that it was all over, and he should forget it altogether and be careful in future.

Another relaxation we had at Mayavati was playing badminton with shuttlecocks, in the evening, if there was no strong wind. Otherwise, we would go for long walks either in groups of two or three, or individually. A major part of the day and a good part of the night used to be occupied by the editorial work. In those days, there was no electricity. Winters used to be quite severe. My colleague, who used to type the articles, and myself used to wear a kind of woollen gloves, with finger tips open, which would enable us to use the fingers either to type or to handle the pen. Blood in the body never freezes because of nature's provision of maintaining a particular temperature in all the seasons.

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Sometimes, we used to keep a lighted hurricane lantern near us to warm our hands and proceed with the work. With snow all around, it was really hard to work in winter. In February 1962, I was relieved of this *Prabuddha Bharata* work. When I reached Belur Math, I was asked to get ready to proceed to London as early as possible, which is beyond the scope of this article. I shall not go into the details of my London stay.

My Third Posting to Mayavati (1978–1988)

Leaving Mayavati in 1962, I was posted to different centres till 1973, when I was asked to go to Hyderabad to assist Swami Ranganathananda, who was to take charge of a newly affiliated Centre. Earlier, between 1967 and 1969, I was asked to go through *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in 8 volumes (recently a ninth volume has been published) at the Calcutta Branch of the Advaita Ashrama, for a possible revised and newly rearranged edition of the same. I completed going through the entire *Complete Works*, inserting the various suggestions made by a special working group set up for the purpose, in addition to introducing the Oxford system of punctuation and spelling of words, as well as diacritical marks for non-English words, as far as possible.

In July 1978, I was asked to proceed to Mayavati — this time as the President of the Ashrama and its Calcutta Branch. It has been a long-standing practice for the President to divide the year and spend about six months each in Mayavati and Calcutta — summer in Mayavati and winter in Calcutta! I followed the same practice, too. When I went to Mayavati towards the end of July 1978, a motorable road was complete up to Mayavati, connecting Lohaghat. I did not have to walk or climb. I understand that the entire road from Lohaghat to Mayavati has been black-topped a few years back. My predecessor had died at Bareilly under mysterious circumstances. Some were of the view that he had had a sun stroke and succumbed to it. The mystery remains unresolved. This time, I went up to Mayavati in a truck. At Mayavati, when I entered the President's office room, there were several letters, books and other items lying on the table, addressed to him. The first task I attended to was to acknowledge receipt of those letters, books, etc., and to inform the senders about his death and change of Presidentship. It took about a week. The President's responsibility consists of general supervision of all the activities of the Ashrama — the hospital, the several gardens and orchards, of course with the help and cooperation of the Manager Swami and other monastic colleagues. My own main work was to go through the manuscripts of new books to be published by the Ashrama; correspondence with the intending guests; and meeting and talking with visitors and guests. Sometimes, I used to go with the guests for evening walks.

It was during the period as President, for nearly ten years, that I had the privilege to go through the monumental manuscripts of the six volumes of Marie Louise Burke's *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*. When I took charge of the Mayavati Ashrama, the first volume of *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, by his Eastern and Western disciples, was already in press. It saw the light of day in 1979. The manuscript for the second volume of *The Life* was ready. I read through it once more before sending it to the press for publication. It was published and put on sale in 1981. Besides these, several manuscripts of smaller books were read and passed on to the Calcutta Branch for further work of printing and publishing. There was a monastic proofreader at Calcutta, who would see the books through the press at various stages. In 1986, to commemorate the centenary of the *mahāsamādhi* of Sri Ramakrishna, a new book, entitled *A Bridge to Eternity*, containing articles on the Great Master already published in the earlier issues of *Prabuddha Bharata*, by eminent authors, both monastic and lay, of the East and the West, was published. It was released by the then General Secretary of the

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Order. The manuscript of this book, quite bulky, was brought by the Manager of the Calcutta Branch to Mayavati. The whole of it had to be read through in about a fortnight. We had to hurry through the work. The whole of it was divided into two halves — one half was read by me, while the other half was gone through by the then Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, setting aside our regular work.

Every winter, about October or so, I used to return to Calcutta from Mayavati with Marie Louise Burke's manuscripts, with my own corrections and suggestions while reading them at Mayavati earlier in summer months. About the same time, she would also come to Belur Math from San Francisco. Both of us used to meet at the Calcutta Branch, two or three times for each volume, and decide finally about the points raised by me during my reading of the manuscripts and other issues that might crop up in the course of our discussion, and settle the matter once and for all. The six volumes of her book took six years for me to complete. To me, it has been a rewarding and enriching experience to go through them. To her, it meant a laborious and painstaking research work lasting for nearly 50 years! A new image of Swami Vivekananda emerges after going through the six volumes — what hardships, trials, and tribulations Swamiji had to pass through during his visit to the West. Without these six volumes, no one would have known what opposition the Swami had to encounter during his work in America and England. It should also be added that there were many good friends and great supporters of the Swami in those countries.

Marie Louise Burke not only authored the six volumes, going to all the places herself wherever Swamiji went in America, England, and Europe, to collect whatever material was available from the contemporary newspapers of those days, to meet people who were fortunate to see and hear him, or their descendants, but she also contributed handsome amount for each volume towards its publication, so that the volumes could be within the reach of the middle class admirers, followers, and students of Swamiji. Let me strike a personal note in this connection. I have had the satisfaction of going through the manuscripts of all the six volumes, despite suffering from old-age ailments, and the pleasure of coming in close touch with a gifted author, now in her late eighties.

Already, this 'My Memoirs' has become too long. There are many more interesting, and to me personally very precious, memories of Mayavati, which I cannot delineate for want of space. If the reader has enjoyed this monograph, it is my reward.

Addendum

This article was written in July–August last year. As I was writing these memoirs, newspapers reported that the Government of India had proposed to carve out a new state in U.P. to be named 'Uttaranchal'. Mayavati, in the beginning, a hundred years ago, was in the biggest district of Almora in U.P., but sparsely populated. About forty years back, Almora District was divided into three smaller districts. Mayavati came under the jurisdiction of the Pithoragarh during these four decades. Presently it is under the district of Champawat. In the new scheme of things, it is not yet known under the jurisdiction of which district Mayavati will fall. Whether it will be retained within the Champawat district or will be relegated to some other district, the easy-to-remember PIN CODE NO. 26-25-24 should be retained. That is the hearty wish of all lovers and well-wishers of Mayavati, including this humble self. ❐

If a man knows Atman here, he then attains the true goal of life. If he does not know It here, a great destruction awaits him.

—*Kena Upaniṣad*, II.5

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'Descent of the Divine at Lohaghat'

SWAMI KIRTIDANANDA

Revered Maharaj, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, was at one time Editor of Prabuddha Bharata. *It is therefore highly satisfying that in this special issue of the Journal, brought out on the occasion of the Centenary of the Advaita Ashrama, we have the reminiscences of an erudite scholar. Swami Kirtidanandaji, in bringing to the fore the role of the Advaita Ashrama, points out: 'To emphasize the fact: the Advaita Ashrama, where there would be intense* interiorization *of spiritual life, was to act as a ballast to the* exteriorization *that was inevitable in the other centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. That has been its unique mission from its inception, and it is all the more so now. And the saga of Advaita Ashrama is the saga of people striving to perfect this art of* interiorization *in spiritual life.'*

Lohaghat, as all visitors to Mayavati Ashrama are well aware of, is the last bus terminus from where the three and a half mile climb to the Ashrama along the narrow village path starts. At the time we are speaking of, the five-mile stretch of motorable road had not yet been constructed; and even when it was ready a year or two later, the Ashrama had no vehicle of its own, nor anyone else at Lohaghat, to put it to much use — one had to trek it on foot only, as we sometimes used to do just for the fun of it or to watch the infinite variety of birds, of various hues and shapes, that flocked the place during the spring and continued to stay on there through the summer and autumn, right up to the beginning of winter. So, the other mountainous track, rough and rugged as it was, was the only one available for travel between Lohaghat and Mayavati, generally done on foot, those unable to do so using the local pony, usually meant for carrying one's belongings that one could not carry on one's shoulders. Tiresome as it was, when once a person had reached the Ashrama and entered its holy precincts, it was quite a different story to tell. Enveloped by an inexplicable euphoria, he would forget instantaneously all the weariness of the journey, however strenuous it might have been. Enraptured and taken in by the breathtaking scenery and the picturesque surroundings — the ever-green deodar, pine and oak trees, besides other seasonally flowering trees; the well laid-out garden; the commanding view of the eternal snow-ranges from Kedār-Badri, Hātiparbat and Nandādevī in India to Nīlkaṇṭh in Nepal (which inspired the famous artist Nandalal Bose to visualize it as Lord Śiva lying supine in uninterrupted *yoga-nidrā* with 'Nandī' (Nandādevī so fancied) sitting at His feet ever vigilant, in a spirit of utmost devotion and absolute self-surrender); and add to that the bracing, salubrious climate, even during the severe winter-months —, one felt one was in heaven as it were. When my posting to Mayavati was fixed up, away as far back as in March 1957, instead of proceeding there straight, I went to Kishanpur first to pay my respects to Swami Atulanandaji (Gurudas Maharaj, one of the seniormost and much respected and revered monks of the Order, Cornelius Heijblom, as he was known in his pre-monastic life, American citizen of Dutch origin), who was staying there then. As soon as he heard that I had been posted to Mayavati, he exclaimed, obviously delighted at the news: 'Oh! you will jump with joy when you see the snow-fall!' And so it was, though I had to wait for it more than a year. Snow-fall one can see elsewhere also, but at Mayavati it

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is a unique experience.

It is now more than thirty years since I was at Mayavati last, and much modernization has taken place, as I hear, like the introduction of electricity, computerization of the *Prabuddha Bharata* Journal, etc., as indeed it should be in the changed circumstances. But the heartening news is: Mayavati has retained its old character; there has not been much change as far as the essentials are concerned, I am told.

Change not thy nature, gentle bloom,
Thou violet, sweet and pure,
But ever pour thy sweet perfume
Unasked, unstinted, sure!

Thus wrote Swami Vivekananda to Sister Christine, his American disciple, in his lovely poem 'To An Early Violet'. And Mayavati, according to all accounts, has followed this dictum literally, it seems. It still is a picture of beauty and calmness, of unearthly splendour and loveliness, of tranquillity and peace, most soothing and comforting. It still is a source of unending joy and happiness to many, which it continues to shed relentlessly on one and all without distinction as in times of yore, without let or hindrance. Lapse of time has taken away nothing of its grandeur and majesty in whose presence one felt oneself sublime and great. The same sobriety of thought and action pervades the entire atmosphere. The same youthful freshness and vigour, the same sweet aroma of heightened spirituality, prevails everywhere. So says every one who has visited Mayavati of late.

Lohaghat, in contrast, presented a dreary look. A sleepy town it was, dull and drab, unattractive and uninspiring. Perhaps it still is, though I learn that it is very much developed now, and is bubbling with activity. Town, I said, but it was just a misnomer to call it so. Hardly anything was available. Mayavati had to get everything — from pins and pencils to toothpaste, typewriter ribbons, socks and sweaters, provisions, everything except the wheat and vegetables that were grown in the Ashrama garden, everything that was needed for the *whole* year, rice, condiments, and all — from Lucknow, and stock them for use during the year. The so-called Manager Swami, accompanied sometimes by another monastic member if necessary, would go all the way to Lucknow once every year during winter for a month or so to make these purchases. It was an event in itself — his going and coming. Uneventful as things were in Mayavati normally, it was an occasion for a mild celebration, with a farewell feast and another when he returned. However, coming back to our story of Lohaghat, sleepy though it was most of the time, once in a year, at the time of *Dusserā* (or *Daśaharā*) festival, it would suddenly turn into a hive of activity.

It was the year 1957, the month of October. The *Dusserā* festival was on at Lohaghat. As all over Uttar Pradesh, and in many other parts of North India, at Lohaghat, too, the festival was being celebrated with an open-air performance of what is known as *Rāmlīlā*, the enactment of the entire episode of the Indian epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, spread over the ten (*daśa*) days of the festival, one portion of the story enacted each night, often the performance extending the whole night. The persons who donned the different roles of the drama were not professional artists, but the ordinary village folk, young and grown-up; the language of the dialogue was the local dialect (a variation of Hindi); and there was a liberal sprinkling of the local versions of the original story, replete with bizarre incidents and country jokes. But there was an informality about it all, which everyone enjoyed, even the sophisticated and the town-bred. The show went on at a leisurely pace, but the message of the holy epic and its morals sunk in all the same amongst the people unobtrusively, unknown to themselves. Thus the ancient heritage trickled through from generation to generation. On the eighth (*aṣṭamī*) day or so, Revered Gambhiranandaji, who was then the President of the Advaita Ashrama, desired that we should all go to witness the show that night. So, we all started for Lohaghat after an early

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dinner or supper, with Gambhiranandaji himself in the lead. The well-known Vālī-Sugriva episode was the item to be enacted that night. The anxiously awaited moment, the climax of the story, as it were, the duel between the two brothers, with Rāma backing the latter from behind a tree according to an agreement arrived at earlier between the two, came. The mock fight with the improvised maces in their hands was going on. Amusing in its own way it was, and everyone was enjoying it. But one of the two boys playing the roles of the two brothers, at one point, struck the other with his mace so hard that the fellow fell down half unconscious, with his head reeling. Perhaps he had some grouse against the other boy, which he wanted to settle here this way. Many amongst the audience were horrified. The injury, however, was not very serious. The boy who had been felled down recovered quickly, and resumed the fight vigorously with added might, to the amusement of all, not the least Gambhiranandaji himself. Rather, he must have been the most amused. For, on our way back at dead of night or in the early hours of the morning, when we had reached what we used to call the 'Ozone Point' in fun, where we leave the village track and join the main road, he startled every one by suddenly saying excitedly, turning towards me: 'Kirtidananda, why don't you write an article on the "Descent of the Divine at Lohaghat"?' The incident at Lohaghat must have been still revolving in his mind.

I was a new entrant at the Mayavati Advaita Ashrama, having joined it just a few months before (in May that year, to be exact), and obviously Gambhiranandaji was trying to have some fun at my expense. Of course, the then Manager Swami had come subsequently after me, but he was elderly, much older to me and senior, though much younger and junior to Gambhiranandaji. Besides, he was so simple and innocent, hailing as he did from a rural background, and Gambhiranandaji, for the life of him, could not have thought of having any banter or raillery with him. Anyway so felt everyone, had a good laugh over it, and gave no further thought to it. So did I, until this call from the present Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* came for an article from me for this special number to commemorate the Centenary of Advaita Ashrama, and my memory went back to that night and what Gambhiranandaji had told me then. Why not try to fulfil his wishes now, which I could not, or did not, do all these years? and thereby pay my respectful homage to him and his memory — to him under whom I spent more than six long, useful years, with all its ups and downs? and whose relationship with me or, whose attitude towards me, throughout his life was, as I look back upon it at this distance of time but had not realized it earlier or realized it only in part if at all, characterized by a feeling akin to what Śrī Śaṅkarācārya expresses in his *Devyaparādhakṣamāpaṇa-stotra* (verses 3 and 4):

Pṛthivyāṁ putrāste janani
bahavaḥ santi saralāḥ
paraṁ teṣāṁ madhye viralataralo'haṁ
tava sutaḥ;...
Jagannmātar-mātastava caraṇasevā
na racitā
na vā dattaṁ devi draviṇamapi
bhūyastava mayā;
Tathāpi tvaṁ snehaṁ mayi nirupamaṁ
yat-prakuruṣe
kuputro jāyeta kvacidapi kumātā na bhavati.

'Amongst the many that can count themselves as your children, O Mother, I am the odd one bereft of all qualities, ever recalcitrant and disobedient, haughty and arrogant, wayward and refractory always and anon, obstinate, stubborn and headstrong; the rest, in comparison, are so good and noble. It is a wonder that you go on showering your love and affection on such a one so unresponsive to your kindness, and go on working for his welfare and progress, here and hereafter, though there is hardly an effort on his (my) part to requite your good intentions. Or is there anything to be wondered at in all this?

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A bad son there might be; a bad mother never!'

Joking he might have been. For Gambhiranandaji, contrary to the general impression people had of him, of being stern and severe always, ever incommunicable true to his name (*gambhīra*), could at times, when he chose to be so, be very witty and humorous, freely exchanging pleasantries with his subordinates very much junior to him and indulging in very commonplace, humdrum talk with them. Once, for instance, at the branch centre of Mayavati Advaita Ashrama at Entally, Calcutta, we had, according to the usual practice at both the places, gathered for the after-dinner reading class. It being winter season, the dinner used to be early, so that there would be some time to listen to the news broadcast at 9:00 p.m. by the All India Radio. Gambhiranandaji usually tarried to hear the news before he retired for the night. At that time a test match was being played between India and Australia at Calcutta and the newsreader announced: 'India (or it might be Australia, it does not matter) seven wickets down for so many runs.' There was one Swami who knew nothing about cricket or football or any other game or sport, though the *Bhāgavatam*, the *Gītā*, the Upaniṣads, and other holy scriptures were at the tip of his tongue, even Shakespeare and many other English poets, whom he would quote often. Gambhiranandaji, on the other hand, well versed as he was in Sanskrit and English literature, not to speak of Bengali, his mother-tongue, an erudite scholar in all these, had lost none of his interest in or zest for games and sports, in many of which he was quite a good hand in his younger days. He, on hearing the news of the test match, suddenly turned towards the other Swami, and said, quite innocently: 'Ram (that was his pre-monastic name), what is this these people are telling: "Seven wickets down"? You know there are only six wickets, three at each end of the pitch. How can seven wickets fall?' The Swami was very much abashed, to the delight of the rest. Quite embarrassed and non-plussed, he simply blurted out in confusion: 'I don't know, Maharaj', and there was side-splitting laughter all around, adding to his discomfiture. Again, how everyone enjoyed the playful teasing by Gambhiranandaji at the dining table of Ananyanandaji, the then Editor (*de facto*) of *Prabuddha Bharata* (who later became the President of Advaita Ashrama himself), for the relish he had for dishes seasoned with coriander leaves, a delicacy that is a must in South Indian curries, but whose smell was revolting and obnoxious to the uninitiated and unaccustomed. Ananyanandaji hailed from the South, but, ironically, Gambhiranandaji hailed from East Bengal, whose people were equally fond of coriander leaves, if not more. In fact, they liked them as much as the West Bengal people hated them. The story is told of a Swami of the Order belonging to West Bengal, who used to feed with sugar the seedlings of coriander leaves planted by the Swami-in-charge of the centre he stayed in, who came from East Bengal, so that the plants were eaten away by ants and not used in the kitchen. However, Gambhiranandaji would light-heartedly make unsavoury comments at the dining table on the days the coriander leaves had been used in the cooking, expecting eagerly a sharp repartee from Ananyanandaji. And sure Ananyanandaji would be too willing to oblige him, not so much with words — he was too soft and gentle to do it —, but with a wry, frowning face, sufficient to express his displeasure at the disparaging remarks made against the leaves. And the resulting mischievous twinkle in Gambhiranandaji's eyes and the naughty, suppressed smile on his face! One had only to see to believe the mirth and merriment amongst the other three inmates, who, incidentally, also were from East Bengal, myself being the fourth, who hailed from the same place as Ananyanandaji.

Anyway, might be it was the same frolicsome nature, hidden for the most part, showing itself openly only occasionally, and

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the tendency to play pranks, that prompted Gambhiranandaji to ask me to write an article on an apparently weird subject like that and at that unearthly hour. The immediate provocation must obviously have been provided by an article by me on 'The Festival of Lights (*Dīpāvalī*)', which had appeared in the latest or a recent issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* and which he must have seen. It was under a pseudonym, but he must have guessed it was mine. For he subsequently remarked: 'Why not use your full sannyasa name? Are you ashamed of it? Like one feeling shy to own one's own child lest someone else should regard it as dark or ugly!' It was an amateurish attempt. He might have thought so, and just wanted to pull my legs.

Or it might be otherwise also. He was not joking at all. He *was* serious. He *did* appreciate the article, and wanted me to follow it up with another, a similar one, on 'The Festival of *Dusserā*'. *Particularly* on Rāma, regarded as an Incarnation of God in Hindu mythology and tradition, and around whom revolved the entire celebration of the *Dusserā* festival as observed in the northern parts of India. *More particularly*, on the Vālī-Sugrīva episode we witnessed that night, the role of Rāma in it considered by many as being unjustified and unworthy of one who was supposed to be the very embodiment of righteousness and rectitude (*Rāmo vigrahavān dharmaḥ*, as it is said), the pros and cons of which have been discussed threadbare by many a scholar in the past and yet is an interesting subject to dilate upon. *Still more particularly*, on the mystique of the personality that draws huge crowds to performances day after day and night after night, performances which must *ipso facto* be but imitations of the real character that existed aeons back and still holds them spellbound for hours together. Or on the psyche of the actors and the audience that went to witness them, in spite of the good deal of caricaturing of the original that goes on in them, or because of it. So many possibilities or choices for the writer. Yet, at this point of time, long after the suggestion came from him initially, it appears what was uppermost in Gambhiranandaji's mind at that hour on that night was not the Rāma of yore, a distant figure of a bygone era, however alive and vibrant in the hearts of the people even today, but Ramakrishna of our own times, *who* lived and moved with us in flesh and blood just the other day, and *who* to many of his followers *is* an Incarnation in the Hindu tradition, that he would body forth once and again whenever the moral and spiritual standards of the people are in danger of being submerged in an onrushing, mighty wave of rank materialism, to restore them to their innate glory and perfection, to destroy the wickedness of the wicked and enrich the goodness of the good; he *whose* advent has ushered in a new era of plenty and prosperity to mankind all over the world, but what is more to the point just now, in Lohaghat and its environs, with its epicentre at Mayavati Advaita Ashrama, the founding of which has rendered a sleepy town in a remote corner of India, otherwise destined surely to be relegated into the limbo of time uncared and unwept, lost to all memory, find a place on the map of the world; and *of whom* Romain Rolland, his famous biographer, wrote: 'I am bringing to Europe, as yet unaware of it, the *fruit of a new autumn*, a *new message of the Soul*, the *symphony of India*, bearing the name of Ramakrishna'. It is most natural to think so in the circumstances: that at the back of Gambhiranandaji's mind when he spoke of an article on the 'Descent of the Divine at Lohaghat' was the 'Descent of the Divine' in the form of Ramakrishna, and none other, the thought of *his* power and influence, and more specifically, the thought of the special, unique role of Mayavati Advaita Ashrama in upholding and disseminating his message of universal love and brotherhood *vis-à-vis* the other branches of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission the world over, Lohaghat in the title being just a substitute watchword for Mayavati. Nothing inappropriate in our thinking so. Is there?

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A well-known, oft-quoted verse in the *Bhāgavatam* (I.ii.11) runs thus:

Vadanti tat tattvavidaḥ
tattvaṁ yad jñānamadvayam;
Brahmeti paramātmeti
bhagavān iti śabdyate.

'The seers of Truth speak of that non-dual highest Reality differently as Brahman, the Impersonal Absolute, Paramātman (the supreme individual Soul), and Bhagavān.'

'*Bhagavān*' is the word generally used in Indian terminology to indicate or address the Personal God and His Incarnation. The word literally means 'he who is endowed with "*bhagas*"'. '*Bhagas*' are divine attributes usually associated with God and His Incarnation. They are said to be six in number: 'Sovereignty or dominion, might, glory, splendour, wisdom and dispassion (*Aiśvaryasya samagrasya dharmasya yaśasaḥ śriyaḥ; jñānavairāgyayoścaiva ṣaṇṇā bhaga itīraṇā*)'. These refer to two facets or aspects of Godhead or the Incarnation of God; rather, more correctly, to the two approaches of the devotee towards Him, the two ways in which he would like to adore and worship Him: the first four attributes forming one group, and the last two another. We may illustrate this by relating an incident from Swami Vivekananda's life. He was on his way back to India after his triumphal visit to America, where he had gone to attend the historic Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in September 1893 and spent there nearly four years, with two brief visits to England in 1895 and 1896, spreading the message of Vedanta. Before returning to India, his friends and devotees took him on a trip to Europe. While he was in Rome, it was Christmas time, and he was completely caught up with the spirit of the season. Naturally, the most exciting of the places he visited therein were those connected with Christ and the Christian Church. He showed the keenest interest in going round the catacombs at St. Peter's, and the shrines of the Apostles, and participated in the elaborate rituals and gorgeous ceremonials connected with the Mass with utmost devotion, not to speak of the Christmas festival at Santa-Maria d' Ara Coeli with its stalls where sweets, toys, and cheap pictures of the Bambino were being sold. He was enjoying everything like a child. The disciples and friends who were accompanying him were surprised. For some of them had heard his lecture in Detroit, America, on Christ earlier, in 1894, in which he had strongly criticized the Western nations, which prided themselves in being Christian and followers of Christ, yet were so materialistic in their outlook and behaviour. 'Yours is a religion in the name of luxury', he had lashed out at them therein. 'What an irony of fate! Reverse this if you want to live, reverse this. It is all hypocrisy that I have heard in this country. If this nation is going to live, go back to Him. You cannot serve God and mammon at the same time. All this prosperity, all this from Christ! Christ would have denied all such heresies. All prosperity which comes with mammon is transient, is only for a moment. Real permanence is in Him. If you can join these two, this wonderful prosperity with the ideal of Christ, it is well. But if you cannot, better go back to Him and give this up. Better be ready to live in rags with Christ than to live in palaces without Him. You are not Christians, no, as a nation you are not. Go back to Christ! Go back to Him who had nowhere to lay His head. "The birds have their nests and beasts their lairs, but the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head."' And here he was completely identifying himself with the very source of all this prosperity, of which he was so critical before. Or so it seemed to the onlookers from the reverence he was showing to the glittering ceremonies, though subsequently he was to say of them: 'Why all this pageantry and ostentatious show? Can it be possible that the Church that practises such display, pomp, gorgeous ceremonial is really the follower of the lowly Jesus who had nowhere to lay His head?' Swamiji's behaviour and attitude seemed inconsistent. So, one lady in the party gently questioned him on

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this: 'Well, Swami, do you like these ceremonies?' His instantaneous reply was: *'If you believe in a Personal God, then give Him all your best — incense, flowers, fruits, and silk. There is nothing good enough to be offered to God.'*

Which is the point under discussion. It sets forth in clear language the two attitudes of the devotees towards their object of worship: one group wishes to clothe the Lord, their Beloved of the beloveds, with all pomp and glory and want to see Him in all His splendour; another, or the same group at a different time, would like to see Him in his simple, naked beauty, devoid of all this external paraphernalia. We see the two trends from time immemorial in the conception of the Hindu gods Viṣṇu and Śiva. Viṣṇu is pictured as the very personification of earthly splendour, Lakṣmī, the Goddess of Wealth Herself, sitting at His feet serving Him. Whereas Śiva is the 'Ascetic of ascetics, the all-renouncing Śaṅkara, the Lord of Umā', who Herself had to undergo tremendous austerity before She could win Him over as Her spouse and which earned Her Her name. Śaṅkara humorously mocks at Him thus in his *Śivānandalaharī* (verse 87):

Aśanaṁ garalaṁ phaṇī kalāpo
vasanaṁ carma ca vāhanaṁ mahokṣaḥ;
Mama dāsyasi kiṁ kimasti śambho
tava pādāmbuja-bhaktim-eva dehi.

'Poison Thy food, serpent Thy ornament; only a piece of skin to clothe Thyself with; and the slow toddler, the bull, Thy carrier! What havest Thou to give me? Nothing! Well, then, give me just devotion to Thy feet!'

Though in another verse he pictures Him as the Richest of the rich (verse 27):

Karasthe hemādrau giriśa
nikaṭasthe dhanapatau
gṛhasthe svarbhūjā'mara-surabhi-
cintāmaṇigaṇe;
Śirasthe śītāmśau caraṇayugalasthe
'khilaśubhe
kamarthaṁ dāsye'haṁ bhavatu
bhavadarthaṁ mama manaḥ.

'Verily Thou are the Lord of the golden mountain, which is within Thy hand's reach; the Lord of Wealth, Kubera, himself, is at Thy beck and call; Thy place of residence (Kailāsa) is flooded with pearls, jewels, diamonds, and what have you; and there are the Wish-fulfilling Tree and the heavenly cow Kāmadhenu to boot, ever ready to supply Thy needs at a moment's notice; and adorning Thy head is the most soothing moon, and at Thy feet everything auspicious and ennobling. What can *I* give Thee? Nothing, I see, except my mind. Let me offer that itself to Thee!'

Thus the devotees delight themselves in propitiating their object of worship, the Dearest of the dear to them. In Ramakrishna himself we find these two aspects well exemplified in various incidents of his life. 'When I first had my exalted state of mind,' he recounts in one place, 'my *body* would *radiate light*. My *chest* was always *flushed*. Then I said to the Divine Mother: "Mother, *do not reveal Thyself outwardly. Please go inside.*" That is why my complexion is dull now.'[1] On another occasion, he was on a visit to his birthplace Kamarpukur, and after a stay of a week or so there, he was to leave for Jayrambati, his divine consort Sri Sarada Devi's birthplace, four miles away. There was a feast in his honour on the day of his departure. He finished his lunch, and was about to start. He had put on an embroidered silk cloth, and his lips were red with the juice of the betel-leaf usually chewed after the meals in Indian homes those days. What with the matching close-collared dark coat he wore in addition over the spotlessly white shirt and *dhoti*, he, indeed, looked quite charming and beautiful. When he came out of the house, he was startled to see a huge crowd outside the gate, obviously gathered to see him off. He inquired of Hriday, his nephew and faithful attendant, why they had come. 'Why? What else for?', Hriday intoned in a rough voice jestingly. 'You are leaving

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1994), pp. 831–2. [Hereafter, *Gospel*.]

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today. That is why they have come to see you.' 'They have been seeing me every day all these days. What is there special today?', Sri Ramakrishna asked. Hriday said mischievously poking at him: 'Today you have dressed yourself so elegantly, and your lips are red with the juice of betel-leaf you are chewing. You are looking so nice and pretty today. That is why they have specially come to see you today.' 'What!', Sri Ramakrishna cried aloud in utter disgust seeing the deep-rooted worldliness of the people which makes them cling to the externals only, 'they have come to see this worthless body, made of flesh and blood, full of entrails and faeces within, which is there today and no more tomorrow! What a pity they do not want to see the most beautiful Lord ever present in the heart within! I won't go today.' And he didn't. He went inside, threw off all his clothes, and hid himself in a corner of the house for the rest of the day. Elsewhere he speaks of the occasion when the desire arose in his mind, as a young boy in his village, to wear a golden ornament similar to the one he had seen a boy wearing around his waist, while bathing. But it had to be taken off immediately, as he felt a terrible pain at the mere touch of the gold to his body and could not bear it. Later on at Dakshineswar, when he was a grown-up young man, he had a desire to put on an expensive gold-embroidered robe and wear a ring round his finger. This time, too, he could put them on only for a while when they were given to him. Just a few seconds, and all his charm for them was gone. He took off the shawl, trampled it underfoot, and spat upon it, saying: 'So, this is what they call an expensive robe! Enough of it! It only increases one's *Rajas* (ego and pride). That's all!'[2]

In the Ramakrishna tradition, the Advaita Ashrama, on the one hand, and the other branches of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on the other, symbolize these two streams of thought and spiritual endeavour. In the latter, Ramakrishna as a person is eulogized and glorified through the various activities conducted by them, just as the *Bhāgavatam* (I.ii.13) bids us to do:

Ataḥ pumbhir-dvijaśreṣṭhā
varṇāśrama-vibhāgaśaḥ;
Svanuṣṭhitasya dharmasya
saṁsiddhir-haritoṣaṇam.

'Therefore, O wise ones, the sole aim and object of all activities we are perforce to do in the world, dictated by our station in life (and otherwise), is the *glorification* of the Lord to heart's content.'

Advaita Ashrama, on the other hand, follows the other tradition of renunciation and pursuit of knowledge for its own sake in the interior depths of the heart, as the same *Bhāgavatam* advocates in the previous verse (I.ii.12):

Tacchraddhadānā munayo
jñāna-vairāgya-yuktayā;
Paśyantyātmani cātmānaṁ
bhaktyā śrutagṛhītayā.

'The introvert and the indrawn saints, with controlled speech, filled with an intense spirit of renunciation awakened by the knowledge of the ephemeral nature of the external world, on the one hand, and the beckoning call of the Life Eternal, promised and assured of by the scriptures, on the other, dive deep within themselves with faith and devotion and find the ever-blissful Atman, the Supreme Self, hidden therein in the inmost recesses of the heart.'

That was, indeed, the behest of Swami Vivekananda to the inmates of the Advaita Ashrama. 'The Advaita,' he wrote setting forth the aim and object of establishing this Ashrama, 'is the only system which gives unto man complete possession of himself, takes off all dependence and its associated superstitions, thus making us brave to suffer, brave to do, and in the long run attain to Absolute Freedom. Hitherto it has not been possible to preach this Noble Truth entirely free from the settings of dualistic weakness; this alone, we are convinced, explains why it

2. *Gospel*, p. 534.

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has not been more operative and useful to mankind at large. To give this *One Truth* a freer and fuller scope in elevating the lives of individuals and leavening the mass of mankind, we start this Advaita Ashrama on the Himalayan heights, the land of its first expiration. Here it is hoped to keep Advaita free from all its superstitions and weakening contaminations. Here will be taught nothing but the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple, and though in sympathy with all other systems, this Ashrama is dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone.' Hence, he admonished, there would be no outer insignia of religion and religious practices. Nothing exterior to show off; pure interior search of the Truth Eternal.

These two aspects are not anti-each other. Rather, they are complementary to each other. They are two experiments with the same objective: the Freedom of the Soul. Both are equally welcome to the sincere spiritual aspirant. As one writer has beautifully put it: 'To the devotee, all is grist that comes to God's mill.' However, it is pertinent here to remember the conversation that took place centuries back between the then Pope of the Roman Church and St. Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian of the Roman Catholic religion. Pointing out to the long caravan laden with the rich gifts of the devout to the Church, wending its way towards the Vatican palace, where the saint was having an audience with the Pope, the latter said, with evident pride as if it was all due to him and his eminence in the Christian hierarchy: 'Gone are the days when one had to say "Silver and gold have I none".' He was quoting the first half of what St. Peter had told the lame beggar at the temple when the latter begged for money, and when the Church was still in the offing, struggling to develop its wings and get a foothold among the people. 'Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee', Peter had told the beggar. 'In the name of Nazareth rise up and walk.' St. Thomas Aquinas, in reply, quoted the other half of what Peter had told and what the Pope had deliberately tried to withhold. He said: 'Gone are also the days when we could say "In the name of Nazareth rise up and walk."' The message was clear: with the accumulation of wealth and material power, the Roman Catholic Church had lost the spiritual power; and so will any other church. Swami Vivekananda knew this, and so it was, perhaps, that he established the Mayavati Advaita Ashrama with the unerring foresight and vision of the spiritual luminary that he was, as a *separate* unit legally — to avert such a disaster overtaking the Ramakrishna Movement, too. To emphasize the fact: the Advaita Ashrama, where there would be intense *interiorization* of spiritual life, was to act as a ballast to the *exteriorization* that was inevitable in the other centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. That has been its unique mission from its inception, and it is all the more so now. And the saga of Advaita Ashrama is the saga of people striving to perfect this art of *interiorization* in spiritual life.

But *interiorization* is not an easy process, as one may imagine. That is why Brahmanandaji, the first President of the Order, used to tell whenever a monk was posted to Mayavati that he had got a 'prize post', not because, as we jocosely said quite often, it was a stepping-stone to one's being sent to America. It is, indeed, difficult, and throws up its own problems. The reasons for it are many. Swami Abhayanandaji, the only monk of the Order who lived up to a hundred years, used to say, we have heard: 'In Mayavati, the peculiar characteristics that one has, become acutely developed — the calm person becomes calmer and calmer, the restless more restless, the irate one more irate, the subdued one more subdued.' He must be knowing, for he spent there eighteen long years as its Manager. It is a case of, shall we say, to quote the Bible: '...unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.'[3] The silence of the place

3. *St. Matthew*, xxv, 29.

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is undoubtedly very conducive to meditation. But it can be very oppressive sometimes, at least to the newcomer, as the late Pavitranandaji tells describing his own personal experience in his reminiscences.[4] Pavitranandaji was indrawn by nature, and *he* felt like that. To the outward-going it could be hell, indeed. Many cannot stand up to the high Advaita ideal that Swami Vivekananda wanted us to practise. Once a visitor Swami, who was very devotional by birth and temperament, started bowing down to the pictures that were hung on the walls of the library. We were old friends; in fact, he had come there only because I was there. I just wanted to tickle him a little. So I gently said: 'It was improper — what he was doing; it was against the strict instructions of Swami Vivekananda.' He immediately flared up, and impulsively yelled at me.... I could only laugh. Of course, his devotion to Swami Vivekananda was no less, but this was too much for him to bear or believe in — that Swamiji did not even want us to bow down to pictures of holy people. This is the condition of many who are posted there permanently as workers. Then, besides the question of adjustment to the loneliness of the place, the severe winter. Particularly those days when I was there — now things are much better, as I hear — most of the time there would be nothing for vegetables except the awfully sweet pumpkins and potatoes, kept stocked during summer, and the cold *capātis* for breakfast and dinner at sub-zero temperatures. Even those who were cool as cucumbers were bound to lose their temper sometime or the other. Only five of us at the time, and in summer six, with the addition of the President. Some western writer has made an analysis of why many, who are well adjusted in life outside, even running big business concerns as their directors or deputy directors successfully and quite efficiently, find adjustment in the monastic community very difficult, if not impossible. One of the three or four plausible or probable reasons is the limited opportunity for an outlet to one's emotions within a small community living together and the necessity of having to see the same people morning, noon and night, during breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner time. The same person with whom one might have had some tiff in the morning is the person you meet at midday at the dining table, the working place and the living place being together, unlike as in the case of the householder who pushes off to the office or factory for work after a brush with other members of the family, the change of place leaving him sufficient time to mend the fences. Especially in a very lonely place, even small things or events, which we may not notice at all in other places, may become causes of great tension. I may relate one instance of how such a thing happens in a matter of seconds, even without your knowing it. It was *Śivarātrī*, and everyone at Mayavati was observing the usual fast. The others were having some fruit juice or tea, but I was on complete fast, *nirjala upavāsa*, fast without even taking water. The next day, of course, there would be a feast. That year we had *rabḍi* for lunch, the thickened milk preparation popular in those parts, which I liked, as others too did. The first serving had been over, a sufficiently good quantity, and I really did want to have another, though I had already had my fill. Just at that moment, Anantyanandaji, who was the Editor then, and I his assistant, before I could express my desire myself, asked me to have a second helping of it. I *refused*. He insisted, and I *flared up* at him. Why? Even now it is a great puzzle for me: I *wanted* to take, and would have taken it if he had not told me, and yet got wild just because he requested me to take. Strange, indeed! But that is Mayavati! It is all part of the same *interiorization* process. The same writer referred to earlier tells in her analysis: the most probable reason for such discrepancies and tensions in monastic communities being the constant attempt of the inmates to divinize

4. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1950, p. 26. See reprint in this issue of *Prabuddha Bharata*.

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their lives against heavy odds pitted against them.

However, during the period of my stay there, such occasions were few and far between. That was because of the sobering influence that Ananyanandaji exerted. There was very good *rapprochement* between him and Gambhiranandaji, the President, and he acted as a buffer between the President and the other inmates. Of course, Gambhiranandaji himself was the least interfering, a perfect exemplar of this *interiorization* process, mostly keeping to himself, busy with his translations of Śaṅkara's commentaries on the Upaniṣads and the *Brahma-sūtras*, which he was engaged in then, and the rest of the time absorbed in his meditations. Most regular in his habits, and punctual, he would be the first at the dining table, whether it was breakfast, or lunch, or tea, or dinner. Most unassuming and unpretentious, in spite of his being a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and having served a term as Assistant Secretary of the Mission, and self-dependent, he hardly expected or desired anyone to be standing attendance on him for nothing; nor did he bother whether there was anyone to see him off at the time of his departure from Mayavati or to receive him at the time of his arrival there, though people did it of their own accord. Not for him the luxury of a *sevak* or factotum, aged though he was. As President, he could command. But he hardly did so. For example, my predecessor there was an active type, and the work at Mayavati was too little to consume his energies. So he used to innovate things to engage himself in. One of the things he did was: to arrange the papers and magazines that Mayavati received on a table in the open verandah (now enclosed with glass) in the ground floor of the Editor's bungalow, to make some sort of a reading room, though there were hardly any outsiders to come and read them. It was his own idea, and the President had nothing to do with it. However, once he had done it, Gambhiranandaji was appreciative of it, and honoured it. If he took any paper or magazine to his room to read, he would invariably bring it back to the improvised reading room, and place them where they were, though there was no need for him to do it himself and could have easily ordered somebody to do it. The same thing he observed at the branch at Calcutta, too. No question of prestige or seniority stood in his way in acting what he thought was correct in these matters, small or big, even to ask for pardon, if he felt he was in the wrong, of a person younger to him by years. In my own case, he admonished me severely once. Of course, there *was* hundred per cent justification for the admonition, but not so, perhaps, for the language used. He realized it within the matter of a few seconds and told me so, almost in the manner of a confession, putting his hand on my shoulders, going out of his way to explain why he had to say what he had said, though it was unnecessary, younger to him as I was by thirty years. No wonder, that was the first and last of such encounters. The then Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* had left abruptly, three months ahead of the expiry of his term, without informing him anything, though he had made all the arrangements for the next three due issues of the magazine to come out on time. But Gambhiranandaji did not know it, and so naturally he was worried. However, I knew it. Though that was the cause of his initial upset, he recovered from it soon enough, and asked me to attend to the work until the next Editor came. The next Editor came immediately after. That was Ananyanandaji, and I had nothing to worry about. Another thing worth mentioning about Gambhiranandaji: his concern so that others are not put to difficulty for his sake, and his strict adherence to certain principles, particularly the ones enunciated by Swami Vivekananda. Years later when he was the Vice-President of the Order, and I was incharge of our Chandigarh centre, during our annual ten-day celebration, I had invited him to grace the occasion and preside over the evening public meetings on the last three

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days. There being no other good room at the time, I had vacated my own room for him. He knew it, and every day he would tell me during his meal time: 'Kirtidananda, you have given over your room to me, putting yourself to so much inconvenience.' So much so, when I invited him again some years later, when he was the President, to lay the foundation-stone of a proposed temple, which, by the way, was his own suggestion made during his previous visit, I had made another room specially for him. This time, I had made a little private arrangement for him to have some fish soup, as a purely vegetarian diet, I knew, having lived with him for years at Mayavati and also having seen how he had suffered during his previous visit, did not suit his delicate stomach. In Chandigarh we do not take any non-vegetarian stuff. He inquired: 'Do the people of the place take kindly to my taking it? Would they like it and approve of it?' I said: 'No, they would not, but they may not mind it in your case. Anyway, I will not let anyone know about it.' He sternly said: 'No, then I won't have it. Take it away.' Any amount of persuasion from my side would not make him change his decision. With regard to food and other customs, while in Rome, do as the Romans do or would like you to do. That is the clear instruction of Swami Vivekananda, and he followed it implicitly. And the confidence he placed in you was something unbelievable. Once he was forced to write the editorials for *Prabuddha Bharata* for a few months during the interregnum that was created after Ananyanandaji's tenure was over, as the next incumbent had not yet come. He would dash them off in his longhand, and hand them over to me for typing and doing the rest, never bothering to know what I had done with it. He must have seen it only after it came out in print in the magazine. Must have, I say, because he never spoke about it to me again.

Ananyanandaji as Editor was one of the most pleasing persons, the most pleasing, I should say, at Mayavati then, and everything at Mayavati during that time was very pleasant, whatever pinpricks and aberrations there were among the rest of the brothers, the result of the struggle to *interiorize* life, as I said, being smoothened by his sweet behaviour, on the one hand, and the daily play of badminton in the evenings, the weekly play of ludo, carroms, etc., on Sundays, and the occasional picnics, on the other, which he introduced into the life at Mayavati, or reintroduced, shall I say, for I have heard it was there during the Presidentship of Revered Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj. He was pleasing, and everyone else was anxious to please him and keep him in good humour. That would create sometimes interesting situations. For example, Ananyanandaji, in addition to coriander leaves, was very fond of chillies, too. Once the Manager Swami was out, and the Cashier Swami was looking after the kitchen. He was anxious to prepare something which Ananyanandaji liked. He got made the *Bombay boṇḍas*, as they were called. It was for all, but a dozen or so he got made separately for Ananyanandaji, with extra very hot chillies put in them, sixteen or so in each of them. Ananyanandaji was very happy seeing them, and had a quick bite at one of them. And, my goodness! the 'Oh' that went out of his throat! 'How is it?', the anxious query came from everyone. 'Very nice!', he was saying, and sweat in profusion was streaming out of his bald pate! Sometime after, the doctor of our hospital there, one Mr. Chaudhury who hailed from Chittagong, East Bengal, the people of which are also known for their fondness for chillies, entered and sat at his fixed place in the dining table. To him also these specially prepared *boṇḍas* were served. 'How are they, Doctor Babu?', the same anxious query from all. 'Very nice!', the same reply from him, but he was swallowing them all without batting an eyelid!

The ludo play was an eagerly awaited event of the week. The Manager Swami and the Doctor Swami were the most enthusiastic about it. But the Manager Swami, hailing as

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he did from a village background, did not know much about it, of which we took full advantage by tickling him into preparing good dishes that day. Or, we would say, there was no ludo play that day, and that did the trick. And for the Doctor Swami, who looked after the hospital, winning the game was a matter of life and death, and every time he threw the dice he would invoke Mother Kālī's name with his war cry *'Jai Mā Kālī'* with intense concentration, great gusto and fervour, adding to the gaiety of the occasion. And the old Makhan Maharaj (Swami Prajnananandaji), who was on a visit to Mayavati, would be so identified with the game that it would take some time for him to be his normal self after the game, particularly if his party got defeated! and he wouldn't let us go either: *'Bośo! Bośo! māthā ekṭu ṭhaṇḍā hok!* (Wait! Wait a little! Let my brain cool down a bit!)', he would plaintively plead with us. I myself once got so wild and upset, again the target was Ananyanandaji, because he was pointing out the moves to the other party, when we were about to win, and shouted at him wildly: 'Gestapo!' For him, of course, it was all just play and sport, to divert the mind and ease the tension, if any, of the *interiorization* process in which everyone was engaged, the idea being: better it manifested itself this way than in loss of temper, etc., as, indeed, it did sometimes. I have heard directly from the late Swami Prematmanandaji, who was in Mayavati at the time, how very often Frank Alexander, the author of that beautiful book *In the Hours of Meditation*, who had much to do with the writing of the original biography of Swami Vivekananda by the Eastern and Western Disciples in four volumes, which is sheer poetry to read, would get into terrible moods of depression suddenly between his periods of writing, through which he raced at great speed for days on end, when he would be at the height of spiritual ecstasy, as it were. All part of the *interiorization* process, again!

Those days, as I said earlier, visitors to Mayavati came once in a blue moon. Among the memorable ones was the visit by Swami Ranganathanandaji, who was then the Head of our Delhi Centre and who came for a month's rest in 1958 or so. Following him, because he was there, came some women devotees of the Delhi Mission, all wives of Central Government Officers, who had formed themselves into a group to serve at the Leprosy Colony there, apart from studying Vedanta under the guidance of the Swami. Among them were Mrs. Lakshmi Menon, who was then the Deputy External Affairs Minister at the Centre, and Mrs. Usha Behl, the grand-daughter or great grand-daughter of the famous Mahatama Hansraj, the Arya Samaj leader (Mr. Behl was Secretary in the Defence or External Affairs Ministry at the Centre). One evening, we had all been to Dharamgarh, 7000 ft. above sea level, sanctified by the visit of Swami Vivekananda, and were proceeding further downwards to see an old temple, a mile or so away. From below was coming a young girl with a heavy load of hay and cut tree branches for fuel on her back. In front of her was her husband, a well-built young fellow, walking leisurely with a *bīḍi* (the Indian version of cigarette) in his mouth, as all *pahāḍis* (the mountain-people) do. Mrs. Lakshmi Menon was so infuriated with this apparent lackadaisical attitude towards women that she caught hold of the young man, and shouted at him threateningly: 'Are you not ashamed? Take away the bundle from off the shoulders of your wife! Otherwise, I will pound you to pieces!' She was herself well-built and strong. The young man got frightened, and did as she told without a murmur, the first time he, or any *pahāḍi* for that matter, had done in his life! Mrs. Usha Behl I mention because of the bold manner in which she faced death, which is a lesson for all of us. I, of course, saw her no more, only that once when she came to Mayavati, but I heard the story later on from somebody. She, it seems, developed cancer subsequently, went to London for treatment, returned somewhat recovered, but had a relapse of the

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dreadful disease, was admitted to the Jaslok Hospital at Bombay, and was slowly inching towards the inevitable end. Three days before her death, it seems, she forbade all her relatives, including her husband and three daughters, to come to see her, saying that her attachment to all of them had snapped and only the thought of the Holy Trio, Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, whose photos were there beside her on the table, was in her mind, nothing else. On the final day, it seems, she wanted even those photos to be taken away, saying: 'I no more need these external props to remember them. I am seeing them now in my own heart.' *Just what Swami Vivekananda had charged the Advaita Ashrama inmates to do:* no external worship of Ramakrishna or recourse to any external ritualistic practice, only the vision of the Absolute Truth, pure and simple, just feeling Its presence at all times. Another thing about her I heard while I was in charge of our Chandigarh Centre years later during the eighties. I was relating this incident about her, *without mentioning her name*, to the then Accountant-General of the Haryana Government, and his wife, who were frequent visitors to our Ashrama, to provide some sort of consolation to them, one of whose three daughters was in a very bad state of health. When I had finished my side of the story, he said in an excited voice: 'Of whom are you speaking, Swami? Mrs. Usha Behl?' 'Yes, why? And how did you know, by the way?', I asked. He said in reply: 'I shall relate to you another interesting incident about her. You mentioned that she had gone to London for her cancer treatment, didn't you? I was working there at that time, and she was our guest. Her condition was so bad that she couldn't get up even. Early one morning, we heard some sound from the kitchen. We got up and rushed to see what the matter was. And what was our surprise to find Mrs. Behl in the kitchen, fixing up the morning breakfast! We were shocked, indeed, and cried horror-stricken: "Usha, you are expected to rest in bed, not to get up like this early morning, that too in this bitter cold." We reprimanded her mildly. She calmly replied: "Yes, I know. This morning you know what happened? My *Guru* came and woke me up at 3.00, saying: 'Usha, get up, get up! If you go on sleeping like this, when will you do your *japa* and meditation?' Suddenly, I felt infused with unimaginable energy. I got up then and there, and sat for *japa* and meditation. It was deep and pleasant. Since I had got up, I thought why not prepare breakfast for all of us, one day at least?"' And her *Guru* was Yatiswaranandaji, and he had passed away years before. I am mentioning this here firstly because it shows how the Advaitic (non-dualistic) and Dvaitic (dualistic) experiences can co-exist in a person harmoniously without any contradiction, and secondly because Yatiswaranandaji was very much connected with the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. He was the Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* for a time, and what Pavitranandaji has to say of him when he was there once as a guest is very instructive, an object-lesson to all of us, spiritual aspirants: 'In addition to regular classes, at times great stimulus had been given to our intellectual life. For some years, there would be what we used to call Sunday "Lecture Class", when one of us would give a talk on some particularly philosophical subject and some others afterwards would discuss the points raised by the previous speaker. ...One particularly remembers the period of about one year when Swami Yatiswarananda — latterly Head of the Vedanta Centre at Philadelphia, U.S.A. — was with us for a change to recuperate his health. He was our permanent 'president' in those lecture classes. Even though the subjects were trifling to him, with how much preparation would he come to our class! His thoroughness and labour would give us the stimulus to be very earnest and assiduous in our own works.'[5]

Makhan Maharaj (Prajnanananda ji) I

5. Ibid.

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have already mentioned. His visit is memorable because of the two major operations he successfully performed on two girls — one abdominal and the other nasal — in primitive conditions almost, as there was no electricity and no qualified anaesthetist, though we had all the necessary instruments and equipment. Besides, he was not a qualified surgeon, not even a physician, though medicine was in his blood, as it were, all his brothers in the pre-monastic life being doctors. Moreover, he was one-eyed and advanced in age. Considering all these factors, it was, indeed, a daring act and a remarkable achievement on his part, we should say. And the amount of pus and water that he took out from the stomach and the nose! Bucketfuls, literally! I even now wonder where and how such a large quantity of water had accumulated within the small space of the stomach and the nose. The regular doctor of the hospital, Dr. Chaudhury, earlier mentioned, who was a mere licentiate in medicine, acted as the anaesthetist. But he openly confessed that he was really frightened; that he did the job satisfactorily was entirely due to the tremendous faith and confidence the Swami infused in him, and the words of encouragement he gave every now and then during the operation. The girls survived.

During that time, since the regular Swami who was looking after the hospital had suddenly left and his replacement had not yet come, Makhan Maharaj, who was an old inmate of the place and was in charge of the hospital in the beginning, was requested to help in the running of the hospital for the time being, as long as he would be there. Ananyanandaji asked me to assist him in the distribution of powder-milk to the villagers, which we were doing. I, on the first day, in my new-found enthusiasm, told the children who had come to take the milk that from the next day they should have their bath every day and put on washed clothes before they come, if they wanted the milk. People in the mountains hardly bathed or washed their clothes. However, I had not realized their difficulty. Where were the water and the soap to wash the clothes? Anyway, next day they came well dressed, after bathing in the river, though it was far away. The Ashrama, of course, could not have supplied the soap to all of them either. They left thoroughly disappointed, shouting, *'Swamiji ne ṭhagā diyā, Swamiji ne ṭhagā diyā,* Swami has deceived us, Swami has deceived us!' From the next day they were their old selves, and I too kept my silence, realizing: the zeal for social reformation is one thing, and translating it into reality is another!

The visit of Chintaharan Maharaj (Nityaswarupanandaji), who was the Founder-Head of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture at Calcutta, I specially remember for the respect he had for the traditional code of conduct. When he came, Gambhiranandaji, the President of the Ashrama, was in Calcutta. Nityaswarupanandaji being as senior as Gambhiranandaji, or more senior, we asked him to sit in the seat where normally Gambhiranandaji used to sit at the dining table. 'No,' he said firmly, 'that should never be done, even though he is not here. He, after all, is the President of the Ashrama.' We may take it for what it is worth. Even so what Prabhavanandaji, Founder-Head of our Hollywood Centre, who had come with five of his American disciples, all nuns, said on seeing simple boiled vegetables served to them: '*They* have prepared for you what *they think* you eat there. They don't know that there are many other delicious things there also.' And then he turned towards us and said: 'Why don't you give them the dishes you take and which you can prepare well, instead of feeding with items which you mistakenly think that they take there and of which you have no idea, or even if you have an idea, cannot prepare well?' A similar remark Revered Vireswaranandaji, the tenth President of our Order and an ex-President of Advaita Ashrama, used to make humorously: 'Belur Math *sāmbār* and *rasam* (two South Indian preparations), the Madras Math *jhol* and

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caccaṛi (two Bengali preparations), and so-and-so's music are all in the same category.' Meaning much the same as what Prabhavanandaji told. A thing, perhaps, to ponder over while extending our hospitality to guests!

The visit of a Tamilian couple was a revelation of the difference in perception of the same thing by the older and the younger generation. They had come with their two sons, aged thirteen and fourteen or nearby. The mother and father were somewhere in the North, where the father was working, the boys themselves in some hotel elsewhere where they were studying. They had come to Mayavati during the vacation. Guests being rare in those days, as I said, we would go out of our way to show our hospitality and make their stay as comfortable and enjoyable as possible. They had come up from the family guest-house below for the breakfast, and we told them we had planned to take them up to Dharamgarh or some other place. They had not come prepared, that is, they had not put on the trekking shoes. All of them wanted to go down to put them on. We suggested: instead of all of them going down and again coming up, the young boys, who anyway had to go for putting on their shoes, could very well bring the shoes of their parents, too. And so they did. Immediately the parents said a 'Thank you!' for each of the boys. For us, of the older generation, it looked odd, and I said: 'What is there to thank? They are your own boys, and should you thank them because they have brought your shoes? They have only done their duty to their parents. Besides, they did not take any extra trouble for it. They were going to bring their own shoes, and they brought yours, too. Should the parents thank them for it?' The father simply said: 'No, Swami, it is not like that. Times have changed, and we have to adjust to the times!'

And, finally, the visit of another jovial Swami, who is no more with us. He, too, had come to spend his time in silent meditation in the solitude of Mayavati. We had heard that he could perform magic. One day we caught hold of him at the dining table to show us some of his magic. Though unwilling initially, he at last agreed when we insisted, and said that he would show us magic after food. We all went out completely satisfied. But by that time he had built up the psychological atmosphere needed for showing any magic. We all went out, I said — we all, except one Swami who kept company with him as he had not completed his meals. Both of them came out after some time. We were eagerly waiting, seated on the two benches outside, which, as we have heard, date back to Seviers' time. And the Swami announced what the magic was to be. Three sticks were placed one over the other on the steps near the benches. We were to touch one of the sticks, and the Swami, standing blindfolded far away, near the steps leading to the Editor's bungalow, with his face turned towards it as an additional precaution, would tell us which stick we had touched. Of course, the cloth covering his eyes had to be taken off after we had finished touching the stick. First time, he failed to tell correctly, but thereafter he made no mistake. He was a perfect mesmerizer, and would solemnly go through the rigmarole of uttering the usual incantations, etc. We were really befooled; we were truly led into thinking that he *had* some magical powers. We went on pestering him to reveal the secret, how he did it all, and he wouldn't. Again, the more our request, the more his refusal. Ananyanandaji, specially, went on cajoling him in every possible way to have him reveal the secret of his magic, promising him any reward in return if only he did so, *rabḍi* or any such sweet he was fond of, and as much as he wanted — for the Swami was very fond of sweets and was a good eater too. And how small and silly we felt, wretched and despicable, when finally he did reveal. It was so simple. Our eyes were wholly concentrated on the sticks and the Swami, how to prevent him from seeing the sticks. We had completely forgotten to take into account the

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other Swami whom we had left behind at the dining table when we got up. He had in our absence made him his accomplice in his magic show. We were exerting all our energies to cover up the sticks from the 'magician' Swami's view from one side, and that other Swami was standing right there on the opposite side, watching everything we did. As soon as we would remove the bandage covering the 'magician' Swami's eyes, he would turn round, and the other Swami would indicate which stick we had touched by scratching his own head or putting his hands on his trunk, or touching his feet, according to the understanding they had arrived at after we had left them. That was the secret. The failure the first time was because the inexperienced accomplice-Swami had blundered in indicating correctly.

As soon as we heard it, we sank down in our seats crestfallen. So, *this* is all that magic is about. 'Thickwits!', we began cursing ourselves, 'didn't Ramakrishna tell you long back that "Magician alone is true; magic just an illusion, all false and untrue"? Yet, the stupid asses that you were, dull-headed muffs, you believed all this and allowed yourselves to be taken for a joy-ride! First class dunces you are!' We were thus showering ourselves with many more choice epithets of that sort, decrying our own foolishness, when somebody woke up to the reality of life and said: 'Oho! you are feeling so much dejected and downcast by this one act of tomfoolery played upon you! What will be your condition when you realize that you are subject to it, or rather subjecting yourselves to it, every moment of your lives? Haven't you heard of that incident in the life of the Maharashtrian Saint Eknāth?' 'What incident?', we pleaded our ignorance. 'Eknāth,' he continued, 'before he became the saint he is reputed to be, was under the tutelage of a *Guru*, who assigned to him the duty of looking after the accounts of the Ashrama. Honest and sincere to the core as Eknāth was, he would not go to rest until the accounts of the day had tallied to the last *paisa*. Once there was a difference of just "one" *paisa*, and it was past midnight when he found out where the mistake lay. And what was his joy when he found it! He started jumping and dancing around like a madman. His *Guru* woke up, and was completely surprised to see what his disciple was doing. He asked him what the matter was. When Eknāth explained, the *Guru* laughed aloud and said: "O Eknāth! You are so much excited and overjoyed just because you have found out that worthless 'one' *paisa* that was missing in your accounts. What would be your joy and happiness if you could find out that *One* thing really missing in your life and which is the cause of all your misery and unhappiness!"' That *One* thing was God or his own Atman.

At once we exclaimed within ourselves: Is this not what Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have been telling us all the while? Like a flash of lightning, the following memorable words of Swami Vivekananda to Miss Mary Hale flitted across our minds:

But this I say,
Remember pray,
That God is *true*, all else is *nothing!*
This world's a dream
Though true it seem.
And only truth is *He* the living!
The real *me* is none but *He*.
And never never *matter* changing!

And Śaṅkara's words:

Yasyām-idaṁ kalpitam-indrajālaṁ
carācaraṁ bhāti mano-vilāsam;
Saccitsukhaikā paramātmarūpā
sā kāśikā'haṁ nijabodharūpā.

'That Supreme Self, one Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, upon which is superimposed this *magic* (of creation), and in which the universe of moving and unmoving objects shines as the *sportive creation of the mind*, I am that Kāśikā, of the form of pure consciousness of Self.' — (*Kāśikāpañcakam*, 2)

And his reiteration of this great truth time and again in his works:

Ābhātīdaṁ viśvam-ātmanyasatyaṁ
satya-jñānānanda-rūpe vimohāt;

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Nidrā-mohāt svapnavat tanna satyaṁ
śuddhaḥ pūrṇo nityа ekaḥ śivo'ham.

'In the Self that is Truth-Knowledge-Bliss, this world shines falsely owing to ignorance. It is not true, even as dreams under the benumbing influence of sleep. I am but that pure, infinite, eternal, ever auspicious Lord Himself.' — (*Ātmapañcakam*, 3)

The entire universe, *like the magic of the magician*, is our own creation, with no objective reality of its own, a figment of our imagination, a fictitious delusion of the human mind, a great illusion cast on us by *Mahāmāyā*'s bewitching veil — body, mind, intellect, friends, relatives, our social relations, the earth, moon, stars, everything (*sarvaṁ caitadavidyayā triguṇayā'śeṣaṁ mayākalpitam; māyāvīva vijṛmbhayatyapi mahā yogīva yaḥ svecchayā; viśvaṁ paśyati ... māyā paribhrāmitaḥ; māyā-śakti-vilāsa-kalpita-mahā-vyākoha; māyā-kalpita-deśa-kāla-kalanā-vaicitrya-citrī-kṛtam, etc.* [*Dakṣiṇāmūrti-stotra*]). Nay, more: it is but a reflection of that One Reality, Brahman, as he tirelessly dins into our ears. So, let us, we thought,

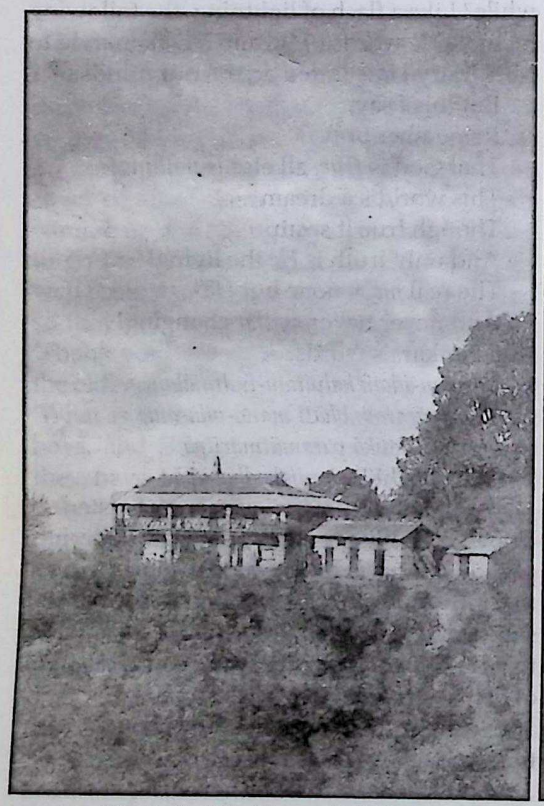
Awake, arise, and dream no more.

Let us,

...be bold, and face
The Truth! Be one with It!
Let visions cease!

as Swami Vivekananda wrote in 'To the Awakened India' (*Prabuddha Bharata*). Was it not for this very purpose that he established the Mayavati Advaita Ashrama?

With this thought reverberating in our minds, we got ourselves refreshed and rejuvenated, with all our dejection and self-pity gone! ❐



The Prabuddha Bharata building and servants' quarters

Mohanlal Shahji, the faithful Prabuddha Bharata staff

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Advaita Ashrama — Its Publication Department at Calcutta

SWAMI CHIDBHASANANDA

Swami Chidbhasanandaji Maharaj is the spiritual leader of the Vedanta Centrum R.V.V.N., The Netherlands. In this short write-up he recapitulates the experiences of his brief stay at the Publication Department of Advaita Ashrama.

I had my life's dream fulfilled when in March 1971 I was appointed City Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* (or *The Awakened India*) — the illustrious journal of the Ramakrishna Order brought out under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda. At that time Swami Budhanandaji Maharaj (since passed away) was the President, and Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj (now the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission) was the Manager of the Publication Department in Calcutta.

I had no experience of any sort in the assignment that was given to me. Added to it, Swami Budhanandaji was a master craftsman and a hard taskmaster. Under his guidance and tutelage I learnt the art of proofreading, correction of syntax and idiom in English sentences, ensuring the exactness of quotations by comparison with the original, and miscellaneous techniques highly essential for publishing a standard journal.

Swami Smarananandaji supervised and conducted many activities of the centre: the purchase of quality paper for the journal and books, which included optimization by considering rising market prices vis-a-vis space and financial constraints; sales promotion activities for our journal and books; advertising, etc. Moreover, on account of his loving and sympathetic nature, he bound us all together. Furthermore, as the Manager of the Ashrama, he acted as the liaison amongst the different departments and their activities. He possessed a large heart which showered love and sympathy on all, bestowed many favours on the needy, and supported genuine cases. Paid workers at the Ashrama, being devoted and dedicated to their work, were also recipients of his generosity.

The most conspicuous feature in our Ashrama by its absence was the chapel for ritualistic observances. There was no ritualistic worship in accordance with the Trust Deed of the Advaita Ashrama executed by Mrs. Sevier. On the top floor, however, there was a meditation hall. The inmates would go there early in the morning and in the evening, as was the rule and custom, and sit in meditation for one or two hours. Swami Budhanandaji himself would go for meditation very regularly and punctually, and stay until breakfast time; we followed his shining example. He was a man of very few words, always indrawn. I learnt later on that he had connections with Sri Aurobindo Ashrama in Pondicherry before his joining the Order and hence the maintenance and practice of yogic silence was a part of him.

Swami Tadrupananda (since passed away) used to stay at Mayavati being the Editor of the journal. He would send all accepted articles and other materials for publication to the Calcutta Branch for correction and final printing in the local press. He was a very good and kind-hearted person. He had invested me with absolute authority to alter and correct even his editorials, not to mention other accepted articles, subject of course to the approval of Swami Budhanandaji.

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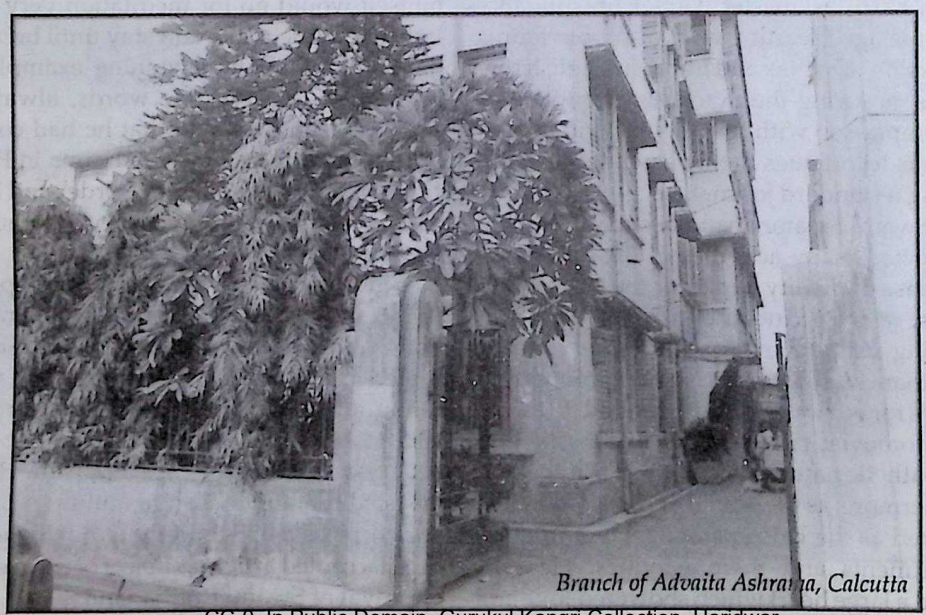
Besides the magazine work and the despatch of the journal to the subscribers and recipients of complementary copies, we also undertook the additional work of proofreading and correcting *Vivekananda Sahitya*, the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* translated into Hindi. We used to work very late, even up to 1 o'clock in the night, and sometimes Swami Budhanandaji too would join us in our labours. We formed an excellent, cohesive and cooperative team — very serious-minded, with a very good rapport based on mutual love and sympathy. Swami Balaramanandaji (since passed away) was in charge of bringing out the Hindi translation of the *Complete Works* of Swamiji. Both of us also worked on the publication of some short Hindi books on Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda.

At that time I had little knowledge of non-dualism. I understood it most indistinctly, vaguely and theoretically. How it could be developed and applied in our day-to-day life was an enigma to me. Nowadays I feel that non-dualism is the zenith of spiritual realization without which one cannot make any headway towards perfection in life. It is duality which causes all anomaly and imbalance in life; it creates hatred, jealousy, egotism, superiority-inferiority complexes; and it is rooted in our ignorance of the Truth and takes us from birth to death time and again. I now feel strongly that Swami Vivekananda established the Advaita Ashrama as his blueprint for spiritual development. All emotions and sentiments that inhere in an aspirant in the beginning of his spiritual journey, which we extol and rate very highly, are but momentary. They come and go. Preliminary practices must be stabilized into a permanent asset by culminating in the consciousness of the non-dual Principle which is the goal of all spiritual endeavour.

On Sundays there would be classes by Swami Budhanandaji or Swami Smarananandaji on the *Bhagavad Gita* and other scriptures. These would be very stimulating and give ideological clarity.

After 1½ to 2 years I was transferred to the Headquarters at Belur for work on legal matters. And that was how my brief but useful stay at Advaita Ashrama ended somewhere in 1972, but the memory of those days are to me a great treasure. ❐



Branch of Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta

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The Charm of Advaita Brotherhood

SWAMI SHANTARUPANANDA

Swami Shantarupananda, presently the Minister-in-Charge of our Portland Center in U.S.A., was at one time a monastic worker of Advaita Ashrama in its Publication Department at Calcutta. In this article, the Swami gives his reminiscences about the charm that the Ashrama and its brotherhood exerted on him. He also highlights how during this period of his monastic life he came into contact with many elders of the Order and was privileged to learn from them.

One elderly Swami who was an ex-Advaita Ashrama worker, told me one day, 'See, there is a great charm in Advaita brotherhood.' 'What do you mean by that?' I asked. 'Oh, you will understand if you are a worker of Advaita Ashrama. There is so much joy in that centre. There our minds constantly dwell on spiritual and intellectual levels. Isn't that great?' he retorted. I thought he was exaggerating. But no, after many years when I was a monastic member of Advaita Ashrama, I could feel that the Advaita Ashrama has a lot of charm. It has some quality or feature of its own exerting a fascinating influence on its inmates. The ambience of that special centre created by the great Swamis of our Order in the past, remained the same. The paradigm of Advaita-life has not shifted to anywhere else.

It was in April, 1977. I was in Cherrapunji looking after the school and the hostel. Swami Gambhiranandaji was then the General Secretary of our Order. He asked me to proceed to Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, from Cherrapunji in order to take up the work of the publication of *Prabuddha Bharata*. Accordingly, I came to Belur Math, and I was introduced to Swami Tadrupanandaji, the then President of Advaita Ashrama. On April 25, in the evening, I went to the Advaita Ashrama branch at 5 Dehi Entally Road, Calcutta. I knew proof-reading. So it was easy for me to take up the work right away.

Next day, as it is customary in our centres, we began our lunch with the prayer *'Brahmārpaṇaṁ brahma havir ...'* (*Gita*, 4.24). After finishing lunch I was waiting for saying the concluding prayer *'Jai Sri Guru Maharaj-ji ki jai ...,'* as it is usually done in other centres. To my surprise, everybody was getting up without saying a word! 'What happened? Don't you say, *'Jai ...'*?' I asked. One Swami said, 'Don't you know this is Advaita? We pray to Brahman alone, none else.' Everybody laughed. In Udbodhan, Holy Mother's House, in North Calcutta, I had just the opposite experience. In 1965 as a *brahmachari* I went to Udbodhan from Saradapitha, attended worship, and came down to the dining hall in order to partake of *prasad*, offered food. I was waiting for saying the prayer. But everybody started eating without saying a word! Seeing me waiting for the prayer, one affectionate senior Swami told, 'This is Holy Mother's House. Mother did not want her children to wait. So, as soon as food is served we begin to eat. Here there is no *'Brahmārpaṇaṁ'*, no *'Jai'*. Everybody laughed.

In the evening I was in my room, preparing for meditation. My door was not fully shut. I burnt an incense, and was about to wave it in front of the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda. Suddenly there was a mild pat on the back of my head. What happened? Oh! that was Swami Tadrupanandaji! I didn't expect

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him at that time. 'Ay, what are you doing? Don't you know this is Advaita Ashrama? No ritual here.' 'Oh, I am sorry,' I replied. He smiled and explained to me the significance of having Advaita Ashrama in the Ramakrishna Order. He was so nice, so friendly, and sweet. It was quite a learning for me from a loving and caring big brother.

The most interesting phenomenon of our daily life in Advaita Ashrama was the reading of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* after dinner. The reading contributed to our learning, wisdom, exchange of thoughts and ideas, and above all, great joy, among Advaita brothers. Swami Tadrupanandaji was very particular about the pronunciation of English words. So was I. Many times we held lengthy discussions and arguments. Then some brother was asked to bring all kinds of dictionaries available in our library! That did not satisfy us either! After a long debate, we went to bed. Sometimes Swami Tadrupanandaji would come to my room with a dictionary in his hand and would point out, 'Look what this dictionary says.' 'But, Maharaj, this isn't Oxford. I prefer Oxford,' I replied. Then we both laughed heartily.

One day a lady devotee, with a packet of *sandesh* (a sweetmeat) in her hand, came to Advaita Ashrama, bowed down to me, and wanted to have that *sandesh* offered in the shrine. 'Oh, no. We don't have any shrine. You may offer it to me if you want,' I said. 'Is this not a branch of the Ramakrishna Order?' she quipped. 'Oh, yes. It is,' I replied. 'Then why don't you *have* a shrine?' I had to explain to her why Swami Vivekananda wanted to have Advaita Ashrama take the non-dualistic approach to the Ultimate Reality, and how Holy Mother also supported it. And I reminded her what St. Paul said, that *you* are the Temple of God. After hearing all my explanations about the history of Advaita Ashrama, she explained with a sigh, 'But there is no shrine!'

As soon as we opened our respective departments in the morning, neighbouring kids would invariably flock around us in quest of foreign stamps. As Advaita Ashrama is a major publication centre of the Order we get all kinds of letters from different countries of the world. And those stamps were the greatest attraction to those little philatelists who later became our great friends and anytime-ready volunteers. Once a comparatively younger kid being inspired by our local kids' coming to us, but himself not knowing the cause of his coming over to the Advaita Ashrama, told me, 'Please give me that which others are getting.' 'Do you know what others are getting?' I asked. 'No, I don't,' he replied. 'Then tell me what you want.' 'Please give me something.' So I gave him a pencil. He was happy. Later, he came to know the actual reason for the other kids' coming over to Advaita Ashrama. Since then he kept asking me for foreign stamps. Now he is a great friend of ours, participating in different competitions and functions organized by Advaita Ashrama.

Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, then the President of our Order, had great love for Advaita Ashrama. Whenever I went to Belur Math to offer him the copy of *Prabuddha Bharata*, he was so happy to receive it. He was transported, as it were, to his earlier days at Advaita Ashrama. He told me how he managed to get paper for our publication despite the paper crisis created by the World War, and how he went to different parts of India campaigning for *PB* subscription. One day I told him, 'Maharaj, Holy Mother said "Do not find fault in others". But proof-reading is nothing but finding faults.' He smiled (he had a divine smile. I can never forget that. Those who have seen that smile know what I mean) and said, 'Proof-reading is nothing but the training of the eyes.'

On May 3, 1977, Buddha Purnima Day, I went to Belur Math. As soon as I offered

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Revered President Maharaj my *pranam*, he began to reminisce about his days in Advaita — 'Then *Prabuddha Bharata* was printed in the Art Press. Some Mukherjee was the manager. One day I went to the Press at 8 o'clock in the morning to chose colour for the cover. I came back to the Ashrama at Wellington Square at about 4 o'clock. Our printing was excellent. Many readers used to write from abroad, "What a beautiful printing in India!" At that time we did not have auditorium and library rooms. Stock-room was small. Many things were kept in the press. *PB* circulation was about two and a half thousand. Immediately after the War, it increased to a great extent.'

Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj was equally fond of Advaita Ashrama. Even as the General Secretary of the Order, he had a democratic outlook and allowed monastic workers, junior or senior, complete freedom. I was directed by the Editor Swami Balaramananda from Mayavati to take the permission of Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj to publish an obituary of a renowned scholar. Subsequently, on 14 May 1977, I went to Belur Math and reported to Maharaj about the obituary. After hearing everything from me, he said, 'You have the President and the Editor. So, what is the need of coming over to me?' I kept quiet without saying a word. After some time he continued, 'If obituaries of persons of such a type have been published before, then publish it. But I cannot say anything about the merit of the write-up.' He was a man of very few words. I got his message. I came back to Advaita Ashrama in the evening. It was, indeed, a great joy and privilege to work with him.

It was during Swami Gambhiranandaji's presidentship of Advaita Ashrama that the building of the Calcutta branch was built at Dehi Entally Road. Years later he came to Advaita Ashrama with his attendant. At that time he was one of the Vice-Presidents of our Order. The moment he came to the monks' quarters in the second floor, his face changed. We could discern on his face the expression of one who had come to his home. With a smile he drew the attention of his attendant to the floor and said, 'Look, what a beautiful marble floor. Did you notice that?' It was a sight to see! What childlike simplicity! To our minds came the words of Christ: 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'

Working at Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, has its own advantages. Almost every week-end I used to visit Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, then the Vice-President of our Order, at Kankurgachhi Yogodyana. One Saturday I called Yogodyana. Someone answered the phone, I could not recognize who, the voice over the phone not being clear. 'Who is this on the phone?' I asked. The voice at the other end replied, 'This is Maharaj'. Again I asked, 'Who is this Maharaj?' (In India every monastic member is addressed as Maharaj; so it was not clear to me who was answering.) The same motherly, very affectionate voice replied, 'This is Swami Bhuteshananda.' 'Oh, Maharaj, *you* are answering the phone! I thought it was Shikharesh or somebody else answering the phone. Please forgive me, Maharaj. I am Viswanath (my pre-monastic name) calling from Advaita Ashrama. But I cannot believe you would answer the phone. I feel so bad. Please excuse me, Maharaj.' Again it was the same sweet, comforting, affectionate tone, 'No, no, don't worry, Viswanath. What do you want to tell me?' 'Maharaj, I want to go to Kankurgachhi today and will return on Monday morning, if it is okay with you.' 'Come, come,' he eagerly responded. I was still embarrassed over the event. However, when I met him in the evening at Kankurgachhi, he welcomed me with an unforgettable, motherly, affectionate smile, which removed all misgivings from my mind. Such are the great souls who teach mankind, through apparently trivial events of their exemplary lives, how to get rid of the

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unripe ego and develop the ripe, divine ego.

On 5 September 1977, the Krishna Janmashtami day — the day on which Sri Krishna's birthday is celebrated at Kankurgachhi Yogodyana since the time of Ram Chandra Dutta, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna —, there was great enthusiasm in the air. That day also caries a great significance in the minds of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. At that time, in addition to my publication work at the Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, I was giving classes on *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. So, I was privileged to go to Yogodyana and to have a very delightful and elevating discussion with Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj on the *Bhagavatam* and other scriptures. We all looked upon him as a living scripture! He suggested me to follow Sridhara Swami's commentary.

On October 4, 1977, two young boys from North-West India joined the Advaita Ashrama as monastics. They were our great valuable acquisitions. We welcomed them heartily. But soon started trouble from their parents and relatives. Of course, they themselves were devotees of God. Even then emotion overpowered them temporarily. As these boys came from the same area, their parents were known to each other. So they came together and wanted to take their sons back home. We were watching the situation, giving those boys moral support in their struggle to take to the life of renunciation. The younger one was more of an emotional, childlike nature. The older one was of a quiet, less emotional, and more practical nature. They adopted different strategies. The younger one took the direct and offensive style. His father was crying and was repeatedly asking him to go back home. Simply he said with a determined strong voice, 'No.' The older one's approach was more or less direct and defensive. His father said, 'Change your *brahmachari* dress.' He did that. 'Come with me downstairs.' He obeyed. At the gate he stopped and did not proceed further. 'Come with me back home.' 'No, beyond this gate I won't go.' Both succeeded in convincing their parents to go back home leaving them in the monastery. We were so happy to see them coming off the battlefield victorious!

We did not confine ourselves within the four walls of the Advaita Ashrama immersed only in intellectual discussions, proof-reading, selling books and sending books to different countries of the world. We did go out of this building, and served humanity as a symbol and expression of the same Atman present everywhere. Swami Vivekananda wanted us to put Vedanta into practice. On every Sunday we distributed food stuff to the needy. At one time, probably in October 1978, suddenly the eastern part of Calcutta inundated. Immediately we went out for distributing food to flood victims who had taken shelter in some school building away from the main road. We reached the spot in the evening. It was quite dark. I think, we were five monastics in that group, and some young local boys as volunteers. But the trouble was that the whole area from the road to the school building was inundated. Luckily we got a raft made of several plantain trees somehow tied together. And that was the only available ferry to cross the river of *Samsara!* As I was the oldest in that group I was requested to use the raft. Other brothers started walking in the dark four feet deep water, not knowing the way. Of course, young boys of the locality helped us. But soon the fragile raft started to sink, and sure enough it sank. Immediately I jumped onto the water. 'Oh, brother, are you safe?' shouted one of the brothers to me, who was the centre of everybody's attraction. I landed safely. We all began our journey: on the way to God through the service of His children. The water rose up to our neck. When we arrived at the school building, we were all drenched. Everybody was shivering. But, seeing the poor condition of the flood victims, we forgot all about it. After distributing food among the afflicted we came back to the main

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road where our jeep was parked. We had wet clothes on except one *brahmachari*. He was quite clever and smart. You can well imagine how he managed to keep his clothes absolutely dry. Seeing my *gerua* clothes totally wet, he offered his dry white clothes to me which I had to accept. When we came back to the Advaita Ashrama nobody could recognize me in white dress. Of course soon I changed my dress into the ochre. It was a great joy in the midst of the awful situation.

On May 4, 1979, I went to Belur Math and offered Revered President Maharaj a copy of *Prabuddha Bharata* March issue, and mentioned that the colour picture of Swami Vivekananda Temple was printed on the cover. After hearing this he said, 'I don't like that. The cover should not be changed frequently. It should remain the same like other foreign magazines so that, if it is kept on the bookshelf, it could be easily recognized even from a distance that it was *PB*. It becomes light if the cover is changed frequently.'

Monastics of other centres used to tease us saying, 'You guys are rich, sophisticated, hi-tech oriented.' It cannot be gainsaid that for any publication centre one has to keep pace with the advancement of technology. *Prabuddha Bharata*, in early days, used to be printed in a hand-press at Mayavati and today, a hundred years later, the system is computerized at Mayavati with a laser printer! The facelift in the Publication Department at Calcutta is even more inspiring. A couple of months ago I was thrilled to get an e-mail from Swami Bodhasarananda, Manager, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta. Isn't that charming? I am in America and he is in India. Within no time we can exchange our ideas, thoughts, and views. It is perhaps the fastest way of communication as opposed to the existing age old snail-mail system. But, I am sure, in spite of all these outer achievements the life music of Advaita Ashrama rests on the slow, sure rhythm of meditation, action and *svādhyāya*. Within this small 'Sophie's World'* each is trying his best to manifest the divinity within. ❐

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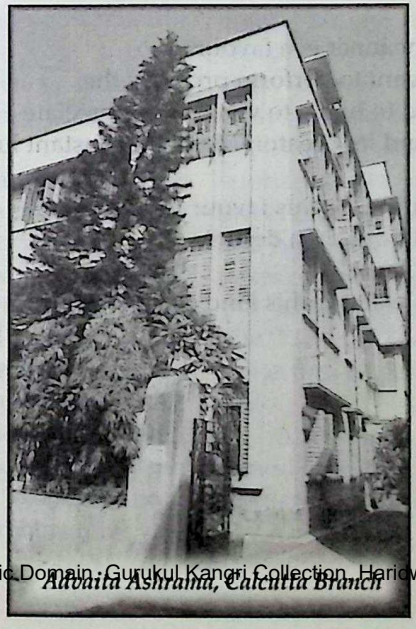
* Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World* (New York: Berkley Books, 1996). A *New York Times* best-seller, it is a novel about the history of philosophy.



Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta Branch

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An Eye!

LALIT KUMAR MUKHERJEE

The author, of Calcutta, was a visitor to the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, in the summer of 1997. This poem was composed by him on 15 May 1997 amidst the scenic beauty and stillness of Mayavati.

For ages you have laid the landscape
Somewhere crowned with snow-capped mountains,
Or a surging seething roaring blue deep sea,
An abundant green pasture elsewhere,
Or miles and miles of sandy desert,
Under a varied and vast umbrella
Called the sky—sometimes purest Blue, sometimes
Dark Grey with specks of white fleeting clouds,
Or even Pink depending on the mood of the
Master-artist who desired to visualize
His own creation and has chosen me to
Witness the same on His behalf.

Ignorant, insensitive as I am,
This panorama does make me wonder sometimes—
Mostly I overlook its majestic variety
And forget almost all the time
To report vividly the mosaic
Of creation to its Master-creator!

Why wasn't the inner eye favoured to
Your own servant to perform properly the
Duty entrusted to him—to view and appreciate
The creation and its Creator! Maintain constant link.

Ages am I waiting for this favour to be granted
To me to fulfil Your own desire!
Ages, ages and ages
Shall I have to wait for this kind sanction? ❐

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Mayavati: Afterthoughts

MAHESH ADVANI

Mahesh Advani, a resident of Mumbai, is a frequent visitor to the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. Rather, he frequently goes to his hometown, Mumbai, carrying sweet memories of his days here. Mayavati has its own charm; some like its solitude and stillness and such do find it a haven for meditation and self-improvement, as this article pictures.

And so it came to pass that one more period of solitude flew by and left only sweet memories to record its passing. But, O, so sweet those memories! The kind that lasts a lifetime and seem sweeter each time one recalls them! Sometimes it seems like one lives a life only to recall these precious moments.

The stately deodars and tall pines — the mingling of a hundred different fragrances in Mayavati's rose garden lovingly tended by the monk in charge of it — the bees that buzzed about in hundreds so that ten in the morning time was drone time; one stood in the rose garden drunk on these fragrances — a merciless assault on the senses.

Walks through dense jungle all day where intriguing sounds of various creatures made you conscious of how small you really were in comparison to the vast universe. The first two days of fear associated with unfamiliar surroundings — lonely torch-lit night walks back to your room through a frighteningly vocal jungle — the shadow of moonlit trees seeming to close in on you. A place indeed for meditation in silence, a delightfully superb concentration grips you. And so the first three days did fly by.

Then came a surge of confidence — fear vanished, you strode through the jungles day or night, fearlessly, almost as a king would stride through the corridors of his palace, secure in the knowledge that all here loved you and that no harm could possibly reach you. Now the very trees exude love, no longer do they threaten with their imposing heights. The birds, the monkeys, cicadas, deer, even ants — all creatures greet you through the day. Their call seems to say, 'Welcome, how wonderful to have you here! Where have you been so long?' A bounce enters your step.

The days pass on, the meditation gets deeper, a more serene person seems to emerge from some place within! That is the Mayavati mystery. The walks through the jungles are a celebration of quiet joy within. 'I am He, I am He,' cry I silently, 'I am one with all creation.' The meditation and the silence both deepen. Three days later, I am unwilling to sleep for the fear of disturbing the stillness, both within and without. Words seem like such a primitive form of expression, so unnecessary, a manifestation of the false 'I', our dear ego. The silence is so eloquent, every jungle sound is so much in harmony with the cosmos. To break this harmonious blend with my alien-sounding language seems sacrilege — like shattering a great master's concerto by blowing loud cheap bugles bought at a country fair. Rude! rude, rude! That's what we humans are!

Expression in some form still feels necessary; so one takes to writing. A poem, a sketch, an article, then yet another article. Then — even writing seems futile! What a waste, what a resistance to allow natural expression of cosmos! Days ceased to matter; sunrise is now the same as sunset, and every sweet moment blends into the next smoothly and harmoniously without any sensation of passage in any form.

A rude awakening! It is time to leave! The 'I' comes back. I have to go. It is time to leave. Oh, no, no, no. But, it is true, it is time to go.

And so it comes to pass that one more period of solitude flew by and left only sweet memories to record its passing. ❐

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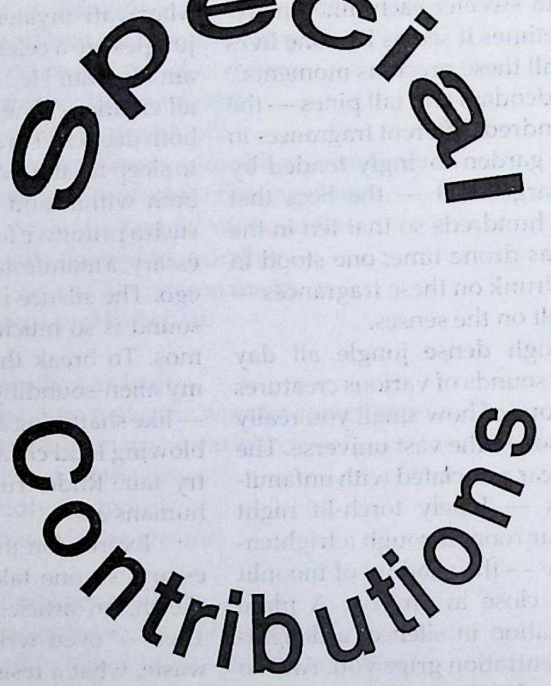

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The Central Theme of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

In this extremely illuminating article based on a talk delivered at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta 700 029; and recorded in a cassette, in April 1997, Revered Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order, brings out the real spirit of the* Bhāgavatam. *This wonderful* bhakti *scripture suggests, the Swami shows, that this world has a divine quality, and therefore God is to be worshipped not only in temples and images, but also in the heart of all. Unfortunately, we have neglected the human situation and, as a result, have suffered for centuries. The* Bhāgavatam *teaches us the fundamental Vedantic truth that we are all one. It also exhorts devotees to love God for love's sake and tells us that life on earth is far superior to life in whatever heaven there be. Hence Krishna's* avatāra, *the Swami explains, represents the glory of the human being.*

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, popular throughout India, is one of the greatest books on *bhakti* which we possess. The *Bhāgavatam* begins with a verse (I.1.1.) which ends with *'satyaṁ paraṁ dhīmahi'* — 'May we meditate upon the Supreme Truth'. What is the Supreme Truth? In the beginning the *śloka* says: *'Janmādyasya yataḥ'* — 'from Whom the universe has come, on Whom it rests and to Whom it returns'. According to the Upanishads that source is Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, which is of the nature of Pure Consciousness. It is non-dual. So, the *Bhāgavatam* says that since the universe has come from that Supreme Reality, it cannot be unreal. As it is associated with that Supreme Reality, it is real. This meaning has been suggested by the words — *'yatra trisargo'mṛṣā'* — at the end of the third line of the *śloka*. This universe is *amṛṣā*. *Mṛṣā* means 'unreal' and *amṛṣā* means 'not unreal'. Because *One* is there in the *many*, the universe is not unreal. This is an important reference to the path of devotion or *bhakti* in India's spiritual life. Unless the world has a divine quality, the path of *bhakti* cannot develop fully. So, in India, this idea was expressed by *'yatra trisargo'mṛṣā'* and then by *'satyaṁ paraṁ dhīmahi'*. This is like the *Gāyatrī Mantra* of the Vedas. There also we find this idea — *'satyaṁ paraṁ dhīmahi'*. Therefore this verse has been called the *Gāyatrī* of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*.

Another *śloka* (I.1.3) of this *Bhāgavatam* is:

Nigama-kalpatarorgalitaṁ phalaṁ
śukamukhādamṛtadravasaṁyutam;
Pibata bhāgavataṁ rasamālayaṁ
muhuraho rasikā bhuvi bhāvukāḥ.

Every word of this verse is beautiful! The verse says that this great *Bhāgavatam* is *rasamālayam* — it is an ocean of *rasa*. *Rasa* is a highly technical term in Indian aesthetics denoting a quality of joy. Any kind of appreciation of art, beauty and other things is made in terms of *rasa*, and the capacity to appreciate it makes one *rasika*. So, if you are a connoisseur, a *rasika*, take this *rasa*, which is this *Bhāgavatam*.

What is this *rasam? 'Nigama-kalpa-tarorgalitam phalam.'* On the tree of the Vedas there was a ripe fruit, full of nectarine juice. A bird came and tasted the fruit and it fell. Here the bird is Shuka. The word *śuka* ordinarily means a 'bird'. But here it refers to the great sage Shuka. Then, *pibata* — go on drinking this nectarine juice. You would not be satiated if you drink it once. So, drink it again and

* Presently he is the President of the Order.

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again — *muhuraho. 'Bhuvi bhāvukāḥ'* — if you have the capacity to respond to *rasa*, you will be able to enjoy this wonderful ocean of bliss. If you read a poem before a prosaic individual, he or she would not appreciate it at all. Similarly, only those who have love in their heart can appreciate this ocean of love which is the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*.

Now comes Shuka, who made this *Bhāgavatam* available to us.

Yaḥ svānubhāvamakhilaśrutisāramekam-
adhyātmadīpamatititīrṣatāṁ tamo'ndham;
Saṁsāriṇāṁ karuṇayā''ha purāṇaguhyaṁ
taṁ vyāsasūnumupayāmi gurum
tamo'ndham. (I.2.3)

This great Shuka, son of Vyasa, I take refuge in him, says the last line. Why? What did Shuka do? From *'Svānubhāvam'*, that Text unique in its inherent power, *'akhila-śrutisāram'*, the essence of all the *Śrutis*, all the Upanishads, he lit a lamp of spirituality, *'adhyātma-dīpam'*, and offered it to *'saṁsāriṇām*, those who are in this world but do not want to be there; they want to get out of its trap. Therefore, here is a lamp which Shuka offers *'karuṇayā'*, out of compassion, not expecting that you will give him thanks; *'purāṇaguhyam'*, this profound *Purāṇa*, the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*.

Shuka's teachings

On Shuka there are a few more remarkable verses because the whole *Bhāgavatam* is essentially Shuka's teachings to Parikshit, India's emperor at that time and grandson of Arjuna. Parikshit has to die in seven days, and is staying on the bank of the Ganges, surrounded by a number of sages. Then, Shuka appears and narrates the story of the *Bhāgavatam*. That is why Shuka has come here. And this Shuka is well described in two or three verses:

Yaṁ pravrajantamanupetamapetakṛtyaṁ
dvaipāyano virahakātara ājuhāva;
Putreti tanmayatayā taravo'bhinedus-
taṁ sarvabhūtahṛdayaṁ munimānato'smi.
—(I.2.2.)

Shuka, even before his *upanayana* (investiture with the holy thread), when he was a mere boy of sixteen, left home and went into the forest. Vyasa, who must have been very upset finding his son going away, ran behind Shuka loudly crying *'putra,' 'putra,' 'putra,'* — 'my son, my son, my son' — and the trees and plants echoed his wail.

The next *śloka* (I.4.5) about Shuka is still more remarkable. It says in its second half:

Tadvīkṣya pṛcchati munau jagadustavāsti
strīpumbhidā na tu sutasya viviktadṛṣṭeḥ.

As Shuka was going to the forest, a number of women, perfectly naked, were bathing in a tank. Shuka, a youth of sixteen, was passing by with no cloth on his body. The women noticed Shuka but did not feel shy. But when, a little later, old Vyasa came in, completely dressed, the women immediately got out of water and dressed themselves. Vyasa was much surprised. He asked, 'You never felt shy before a naked youth. But I am old, and you feel shy! Why is that?' The ladies replied, 'O sage, you have body-consciousness. But Shuka has no consciousness of his body, so we also had no body-consciousness in his presence.'

Love for love's sake

That is a wonderful light thrown on Shuka's character. Sri Ramakrishna loved the character of Shuka and used to say that Narendra (later Swami Vivekananda) was his Shuka. This Shuka was a great devotee of the Divine. Why should he be called a great devotee? The *Bhāgavatam* is going to answer that question, and tell us about the nature of his devotion. It is *bhakti* or devotion of a very special type, in fact, the highest type — love for love's sake. There is no other motive at all.

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So,

Ātmārāmāśca munayo
nirgranthā apyurukrame;
Kurvantyahaitukīṁ bhaktim-
itthambhūtaguṇo hariḥ. (I.7.10)

This verse suggests that Shuka was *ātmārāmaḥ* — free from all bondages. He delighted in his Atman and found no delight in anything of this world. *Ātmārāmaḥ* is an Upanishadic idea that appears in the *Bhāgavatam*. *Ātmārāmāśca 'munayo nir-granthāḥ'* — these sages are absolutely free from all bondages and, *'apyurukrame kurvanti ahaitukīṁ bhaktim'*, yet they practise *bhakti* towards Hari (God). Why? And what kind of *bhakti* is theirs? Theirs is a unique type of *bhakti* — *ahaitukīm bhaktim* — motiveless *bhakti*. Such a devotee says, 'I don't want anything from You, O God. I only love You for love's sake.'

The *Bhāgavatam* tells us about the subject of love from the lowest to the highest level. Indeed love can have any number of dimensions. But the highest dimension is love for love's sake, which is exemplified by two characters in the *Bhāgavatam*. One such character is Shuka, and the other is Prahlada. Here, in this particular *śloka* (I.7.10), we find that the great sage is narrating the story of Hari — Hari, who draws the heart of all people to Himself. He attracts everyone, both ordinary and extraordinary people. That is the principal idea you get from this verse.

Now, as Shuka entered into the pavilion of Parikshit, who was waiting for his impending death on the bank of the Ganges, everyone stood up in reverence. Shuka was no doubt a youth of sixteen, but he was so pure and wise that all had great respect for him. Shuka then started narrating the story that makes up the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*.

Kapila's instruction

In the third *skandha*, there is the story of an Incarnation of God, Kapila, who wanted to leave home and go to the forest. His mother, Devahūti, said to Kapila, 'My dear son, before you go away, please give me some spiritual instructions.' So, in the third *skandha* (chapter 29), we come across a remarkable exposition of the truest spiritual life. However, one great idea that is thrust again and again upon the readers is that God is to be worshipped not only in a temple, not only in the image, but in the heart of all. Why heart? Because God dwells in the heart of all.

We forgot this beautiful idea in India for the last thousand years. We neglected the human situation. There were of course worshippers of images and temples all the time. But as we neglected human beings, we became slaves to foreign conquerors for centuries together. In *śloka* (III.29.21) Kapila is saying, *'Ahaṁ sarveṣu bhūteṣu bhūtātmāvasthitaḥ sadā'* — 'I am in the heart of all beings as their Self'. *'Tamavajñāya māṁ martyaḥ kurute'rcāvidambanam'* — 'yet some people ignore and insult Me and worship Me only in the images.' What a foolish idea it is! Therefore, he said (III.29.24):

Ahamuccāvacairdravyaiḥ
kriyayotpannayānaghe;
Naiva tuṣye'rcito'rcāyāṁ
bhūtagrāmāvamāninaḥ.

Mother, I am not pleased with the pujas and offerings of people who spend vast sums on rituals and ceremonies. I do not accept their worship at all.

We have neglected this teaching for scores of centuries. Although we have been studying the *Bhāgavatam*, we have not understood the spirit behind it.

And in verse 27 Kapila says:

Atha māṁ sarvabhūteṣu
bhūtātmānaṁ kṛtālayam;
Arhayeddānamānābhyāṁ
maitryābhinnena cakṣuṣā.

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'Arhayet' means *arhana* or *arcana*. You should worship Me in all beings (*sarvabhūteṣu*) because *bhūtātmānam*, I am their Self; *kṛtālayam*, I have already built a temple in their body. *Arhayet*, so worship Me. But how to worship God in man? Do you have to stop a man on the street and say, 'Wait, I want to worship you.'? No. That is not the way. Then how to worship God in man? First, *dāna*. Remove the wants of the needy if you can. If they are ignorant, give them education. If they are poor, give them some money or the things they need. If they have no peace, give them peace. This is *dāna*. And when you give anything, do not be proud or arrogant. *Māna* — give respectfully.

Two significant words

Then come two significant words — *'maitrī'* and *'abhinna cakṣu'*. First you have to be friendly. When you go to an Indian village to work, villagers are afraid of you. Why? Because they have always been exploited and they feel you have gone to the village to exploit them once again. So, you have to be their friend first and, then and then only, you can serve them properly. Lastly, one profound expression comes and that is central in Vedanta, especially Advaita Vedanta. What is that? *'Abhinnena cakṣuṣā'* — an attitude of non-separateness. We are all one. We are not separate. What a lofty concept! India has preached this *'abhinnena cakṣuṣā'* since the Upanishadic times. But this country has always practised *'bhinnena cakṣuṣā!'* Casteism and all sorts of human slavery, we have practised here for centuries! Swami Vivekananda went around India and saw the suffering of the people. In a letter from America dated 20 August 1893, he wrote to Alasinga Perumal,

> No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism. [*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, vols. 1 to 8, 1989; vol. 9, 1997), vol. 5, p. 15. Hereafter *Complete Works*.]

In a lecture delivered in Madras entitled 'The Future of India', Swami Vivekananda dealt with this subject. He said:

> For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote — this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for the time from our minds. This is the only god that is awake, our own race — 'everywhere his hands, everywhere his feet, everywhere his ears, he covers everything.' All other gods are sleeping. What vain gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the god that we see all round us, the Virat? [*Complete Works*, vol. 3, pp. 300–01.]

Swamiji exhorted us to *worship* these people. No other English word will do. The word *service* is not enough; *worship* is the right word. The whole Ramakrishna-Vivekananda philosophy is based on this precept that divinity is present in every human being and service to them is real worship. Sri Ramakrishna himself said, every *jiva* is Shiva. This is one great lesson we have to learn in India. Our philosophy, our spirituality are very high. But our society is low; human beings often have little status here. In this modern age, Vivekananda came to revolutionize our social relationships, to create an attitude of *samatvam*, or sameness. In the *Gita*, Sri Krishna taught the same thing — that we are all one. Today we have no kings, no emperors; we are all citizens of free India. Everyone has one vote. We are all equal. This is called democracy. And our political aspirations and methods being currently followed tally with this teaching. Here is therefore a great Vedantic idea — *abhinnena cakṣuṣā* — and this applies to every human being irrespective of caste, creed, religion or social status. That divinity is there in every human being, was a unique discovery of the Upanishads. That idea developed later on through the *Gita*, then through the *Bhāgavatam* and many other sacred books. And today Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda have added a new dimension to the concept by preaching the worship of God through service to man. That idea is to be

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found in the third *skandha* of the *Bhāgavatam*.

The story of Dhruva

Then in the seventh *śloka* of the eighth chapter of the fourth *skandha* of the *Bhāgavatam*, we find the story of Dhruva, the son of king Uttanapada through his wife Suniti. Uttanapada had another wife named Suruchi. She was his favourite wife, so naturally her son Uttama was very dear to him. One day the five-year-old boy Dhruva noticed that his father was fondling his brother Uttama who was sitting on his lap. So, he too went to sit on the lap of his father. Suruchi saw this and got angry. She reproached Dhruva saying that he had no right to sit on the lap of his father. 'Were you born of my womb, then only you could sit on your father's lap.' Dhruva became very upset. He went to his mother Suniti and started to cry. Suniti said, 'What can I do, my son? I am really helpless. Pray to God; only He can help you.'

Dhruva went to the forest with a heavy heart. On the way he met Narada who told him, 'You are a Kshatriya boy, why are you here? It is a disgrace for you to be here.' But Dhruva was firm. He said he must go to worship the Divine. Narada was pleased with his resolve. He gave him instructions on how to meditate, what *mantra* (sacred Name) to repeat for six months. Dhruva meditated on God as instructed. Towards the end of his *sadhana* (spiritual practice), God appeared but the boy still had his eyes closed. He was seeing God within, but that God was already standing in front of him. What did God do? He disappeared from the boy's heart and as soon as He disappeared from his heart, Dhruva opened his eyes. He found God standing in front of him and wanted to praise Him. But he was a mere child of five years. He had no command over language and did not know how to praise Hari. He only stood with folded hands. So, the *Bhāgavatam* says (IV.9.4): *'Kṛtāñjaliṁ brahmamayena kambunā pasparśa bālaṁ kṛpayā kapole'* — Hari, out of grace, just touched his cheek with His conch called *brahmamaya*, the symbol of knowledge. Immediately, tremendous knowledge flashed in Dhruva's mind and he started praising God wonderfully. That is the story of Dhruva.

Superiority of this life

Next comes a new idea, that life on earth is far superior to life in heaven. The Upanishads have blasted our belief in heaven. They say that only fools do rituals here in order to go to heaven. In the fifth *skandha* of the *Bhāgavatam*, we find the famous *śloka* which declares that it is a privilege to be born in *Bharatavarsha* (India).

Aho amīṣāṁ kimakāri śobhanaṁ
prasanna eṣāṁ sviduta svayaṁ hariḥ;
Yairjanma labdhaṁ nṛṣu bhāratājire
mukundasevaupayikaṁ spṛhā hi naḥ.
—(V.19.21)

Oh, what wonderful deeds, the people of India have done, or perhaps, by the grace of God they have been born in this holy land. We too, who are in heaven, wish to be born in India to have the privilege of serving Mukunda *(God).*

People try to observe various rituals and thereby try to go to heaven. Even the gods and goddesses want to be born as human beings, while we try to go to heaven! But everything is here in this world, in this life. The Upanishads say we are of the nature of Brahman. *'Tat tvam asi'*, says the *Chhāndogya Upaniṣad* — You are that Divine, you are not finite, you are Infinite. Many passages are to be found in the Upanishads where the dignity of the human being is expressed and expounded. But we forget all that. In the *Bhāgavatam* too, this idea comes once again. It says that this earth is everything. We can do everything here. We can realize our true nature here. Therefore, the word *'iha'* comes again and again in all our Upanishads, the *Bhāgavatam* and the *Gita*. *Iha*, (on this very earth) you can achieve the highest, you can achieve the supreme realization

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of the Divine. Shuka achieved it here and we can also achieve it. In this way, this beautiful idea of the sacredness of the human personality is extolled again and again.

Today modern biologists speak of human uniqueness. Earlier, they repudiated the idea of human uniqueness — that man is a special creation of God — suggested by Christian theology. Darwin and other scientists simply repudiated that theory. They talked about the process of evolution. But the uniqueness of man has to be recognized. Man can understand the world and can control it. In man, there is a profound focus, the focus of the Self. No animal has that focus. In the *Sūtra bhāṣya*, Shankaracharya describes human nature as *nitya, śuddha, buddha, mukta*. You are that Infinite Self, you have to realize It. And this human body has the capacity to know the world and the Atman as well. This is the uniqueness of the human being. And so in the *Bhāgavatam* you have this idea — the uniqueness of the human being — stressed time and again. Everything can be realized here. Today in Ramakrishna's teachings we find '*Hethāi, hethāi, Jñāna; sethāi, sethāi, ajñāna*', 'Everything is *here*, that is knowledge; everything is *there*, that is ignorance'. Therefore, *iha* is a word full of meaning — this human situation must be studied and its possibilities realized. Physical science has studied nature's possibilities and nuclear energy is the discovery of the forces hidden in nature. But still there are also infinite possibilities hidden in every human being. That is the message, coming from the Upanishads and that is what we have to understand today.

The story of Prahlada

Let us now deal with the seventh *skandha* of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* where we find the story of Prahlada. Prahlada, the five-year-old child of Hiranyakashipu, was absolutely pure, but Hiranyakashipu was a dictator — like Hitler — who hated all gods and goddesses. Prahlada said, 'Father, you are only a human being and will die one day. I believe that it is better to renounce this life and go to the forest to take refuge in Hari who is Supreme.' Hiranyakashipu was very disturbed and started persecuting this boy in all conceivable ways. He appointed a teacher to remove all these notions about God and the Supreme Being from the mind of his son. But Prahlada was so strong and steady that when the teacher was away, he called his playmates and said:

Kaumāra ācaret prājño
dharmān bhāgavatāni;
Durlabhaṁ mānuṣaṁ janma
tadapyadhruvamarthadam. (VII.6.1)

My dear friends, try to practise the Bhāgavata Dharmas *right from childhood because this human life is rare, and in this human life only can you realize God. The wise therefore worship God in this very life.*

What is *Bhāgavata dharma*? There is divinity in all as well as in me. So, establish happy relations with others and have the spirit of service to other people. This body is just an instrument; any moment it may go. So, practise *dharma* seriously.

In the same chapter, there is another *śloka*, (VII.6.19), that says:

Na hyacyutaṁ prīṇayato
bahvāyāso'surātmajāḥ;
Ātmatvāt sarvabhūtānāṁ
siddhatvādiha sarvataḥ.

This is pure Vedantic teaching. The word *acyuta* generally refers to Krishna. *Acyuta* means he who has no *cyuti*. He cannot be dislodged or displaced. He does not perish. He is the Imperishable Reality. It is not at all difficult to please that *acyuta* because He does not go here and there. He is here, He is already attained. He is your own Infinite Self. In every sense He is an accomplished Truth hidden within you. You have only to realize this —

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that is all. This is Prahlada's teaching.

Ultimately, Nrisimha (God in the form of a man-lion) came and killed Hiranyakashipu. Everyone was frightened at the sight of the face of Nrisimha. The only one who was absolutely fearless was the boy, Prahlada. He smiled and prayed to Nrisimha to withdraw His anger and make His face softer (VII.9.14). These sweet words pleased Nrisimha who now said, 'Prahlada, I am very well pleased with you. Ask any boon from Me':

Prahlāda bhadra bhadraṁ te
prīto'haṁ te'surottama;
Varaṁ vṛṇīṣvābhimataṁ
kāmapūro'smyahaṁ nṛṇām. (VII.9.52)

However, Prahlada said, 'I am not a trader in love. I only love You, and I do not want anything in return.'

Shuka and Prahlada thus represent the highest type of *bhakti* — Love for love's sake. But *bhakti* can be of different types. In the eleventh *skandha* (chapter 20, *śloka* 8), Bhagavan Sri Krishna says:

Yadṛcchayā matkathādau
jātaśraddhastu yaḥ pumān;
Na nirviṇṇo nātisakto
bhaktiyogo'sya siddhidaḥ.

He who, by good fortune, loves to hear about Me and who is neither averse to work nor too much attached to the fruits thereof, derives benefit from *bhakti-yoga.*

Suppose you are going along a road, and by chance you find some lecture is being delivered on the roadside. You just listen to the lecture and hear something about God. That discourse perhaps inspires you a little. That is called *'yadṛcchayā matkathādau'* — words about God you hear by chance, and these words slowly take root in your mind. That is, a little devotion begins in you. You do not as yet have a spirit of renunciation; but you do not have too much attachment either. To that kind of a person *bhakti-yoga* will be effective and take him to the highest level of realization. That is why *bhakti-yoga* is said to be for all. Even ordinary people can follow *bhakti-yoga;* it does not matter if there is a little bit of worldly attachment in them; only a little love must enter their mind.

In this context I wish to mention that the whole world today is hungry for this one single value — love. Bertrand Russell says in one place that the world is in a mess today. We can solve this mess if there is a little love in the heart of man. Sorokin also said that a little altruism in the heart of man can make the world a better place to live in. It is this concept of love that has been wonderfully developed in the *Bhāgavatam.* Even a little ordinary worldly love is great if it is *real.* Love is not merely a little nervous titillation, it is something deeper. It has a spiritual dimension. I often hear — 'love, love, love' everywhere. But those who experience love will not talk about it. Those who have no experience go on talking volumes on love. In fact, we do not know how to love. Love is not for two minutes or two days. Real love is something permanent. Begin with ordinary love. But you can develop it, make it purer and soar to higher and higher levels. The *Bhāgavatam* deals with all these types of love.

In the *Gita* (7.16) also, Bhagavan Krishna has said: *'Ārto jijñāsurarthārthī jñānī ca bharatarṣabha!'* — Four types of people worship Me, O Arjuna! The man in distress, the seeker for knowledge, the seeker for wealth, and the man of wisdom. Of these four, the *jñāni* is supreme, says Krishna. But these are all various stages of love. One day Sri Ramakrishna asked a young man, 'Do you love anybody?' 'No, I don't.' 'What a dry fellow you are!' said Ramakrishna. So love somebody. Then you can develop that love, make it purer, nobler; but have that capacity to love. This teaching is in the *Bhāgavatam* and throughout the book it comes up again and again.

Churning of the ocean

Then we come to the seventh chapter of

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the eighth *skandha* where the subject of '*samudra manthana*' (the churning of the ocean) is described. There we find gods and *asuras* have joined together to churn the ocean. As the churning started, many good things as well as tremendous poison, *kālakūṭa*, came up. The gods became frightened because nobody could handle that poison that was burning the world. They went to Brahma for a solution. But he said, 'Sorry, I can't do anything. That poison is too hard for me.' Everybody said more or less the same thing. So, the gods decided to go to Kailas where Shiva lived, to get some help.

Shiva was in deep meditation, but he found everybody in distress. So, he became compassionate and said, 'What can I do for you?' The gods said, 'The world is burning; please come and save us.'

Shiva then went to the ocean and saw how frightened everyone was. He said, 'I shall drink this poison. I may die as a result, but the world will be saved.' He took the poison in his hand and quietly swallowed it. But the poison was very powerful; it stayed stuck to the throat. From that day Mahadeva, i.e. Shiva, had a new name, *Nīlakaṇṭha*, 'the Blue-throated'. This myth has a profound meaning and the moral of the story is given in one *śloka:*

Tapyante lokatāpena
sādhavaḥ prāyaśo janāḥ;
Paramārādhanaṁ taddhi
puruṣasyākhilātmanaḥ. (VIII.7.44)

Very often compassionate people feel for the suffering of others.

The world is in distress. Naturally, we want to have such compassionate people. When we become compassionate, then and then only is our worship of the Divine real. We must try to remove the distress of others. That is real spirituality. One may ask, 'Why is the Supreme *Purusha* or the Divine to be worshipped?' The answer is, '*Akhilātmanaḥ*' — because He is the Self of all.

Some time ago, I interpreted the above story before an audience in Dallas, USA. I told them that Shiva is in Kailas. Kailas is now in Chinese Tibet. But actually, the suggestion is that Shiva is within you. Our brain is the place of Shiva. If we can manifest a little Shiva nature in our character, we can digest all worldly poison. Husband and wife live together to churn the ocean, to get joy in this world. But sometimes poison also comes up in the process and affects human relationships. When poison comes, the husband shoves it to his wife and the wife shoves it to her husband. One day, they explode and the suffering becomes unbearable. But if you can digest some of the poison through your Shiva nature, there will be no problem at all. That is the meaning of this myth. Shiva actually is not sitting in Kailas. That is myth. But He is a reality in human life. So, that is a wonderful story in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*.

The story of Mahabali

Later, in the fifteenth chapter [of the eighth *skandha*], the *Bhāgavatam* narrates the story of Mahabali, a great king. It is interesting in this connection to note that his country had no caste system — perfect equality existed between human beings. But custodians of that time did not like this. So, God incarnated as *Vāmana Avatāra*. One *śloka* tells about the sign of the grace of God on a human being. What is that sign? The verse says, if you have good birth, good education, plenty of money and power, yet you do not become arrogant and proud, that shows that Divine grace is on you.

Janmakarmavayorūpavidy-
aiśvaryadhanādibhiḥ;
Yadyasya na bhavet stambha-
statrāyaṁ madanugrahaḥ. (VIII.22.26)

Today, in India, many people hold power and possess great wealth. They will also get Divine grace, and if they do, they will not be-

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come arrogant or proud. That is the lesson we learn from this *śloka.*

Now we come to the tenth *skandha,* to the story of Sri Krishna. Shuka had earlier referred to Krishna along with other *avataras.* But Parikshit was not satisfied. He therefore requested Shuka to narrate the story of Krishna in detail. Then Shuka said, 'Yes, I shall do so.' That *śloka* is beautiful.

Evaṁ niśamya bhṛgunandana sādhuvādaṁ
vaiyāsakiḥ sa bhagavānatha viṣṇurātam;
Pratyarcya kṛṣṇacaritaṁ kalikalmaṣaghnaṁ
vyāhartumārabhata bhāgavatapradhānaḥ.
—(X.1.14)

Shuka became very happy and showed honour to the king for his devout attitude and started narrating the wonderfully pure character of Krishna. What is *'Kṛṣṇa-caritam'*? *'Bhāgavata-pradhānaḥ'* — the essential element of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam,* and *'kali-kalmaṣa-ghnam'* — it destroys the evils of *Kali* (Iron Age). After verse fourteen of the first chapter of the tenth *skandha,* Shuka begins the story of Krishna's birth in prison as the Divine Child of Vasudeva and Devaki. Highly philosophical verses now follow. In the third chapter, is Devaki's prayer, which says:

Martyo mṛtyuvyālabhītaḥ palāyan
lokān sarvān nirbhayaṁ nādhyagacchat;
Tvatpādābjaṁ prāpya yadṛcchayādya
svasthaḥ śete mṛtyurasmādapaiti. (X.3.27)

Looking at the Divine Child, Devaki says, 'As soon as a human being is born, death is after him and he starts running in fear. But if by chance he gets a place at Your feet, O Lord, he has nothing to fear. The feet of the Lord is the place where he gets absolute peace and rest.'

The story of Krishna proceeds. What is important to note here is that Krishna's *avatara* represents the glory of the human being. God becoming a human being raises humans to a higher level and gods cannot do any harm to human beings if they are true to themselves. Thus, in the story of Krishna, we find the account of Indra who tried to challenge Krishna, the boy who was doing all sorts of miraculous things. Krishna's spectacular feats angered Indra. He thought that this boy had no right to do all those things without his permission. So, he wanted to teach Krishna a lesson. Ultimately, however, Indra was thoroughly defeated and he came to apologize to Krishna saying, 'You are really great, I am nothing.'

The same thing happened to Brahma also. He did the same thing as Indra and met with the same result. I am mentioning these stories to emphasize that the teaching of Vedanta — the greatness of the human form — is also there in the *Bhāgavatam.* I call Krishna 'the Pied Piper of the Indian heart'. Poets, artists, philosophers, politicians, men, women, children, sages — all have been attracted by Krishna. He has tremendous influence on all aspects of Indian culture. That is why we call Him the *Pūrṇa Avatāra* — a complete manifestation of the Divine.

Gopika Gitam

Then we come to that wonderful thirty-first chapter of the tenth *skandha* which is known as the *Gopikā Gītam.* The ninth verse says:

Tava kathāmṛtaṁ taptajīvanaṁ
kavibhirīḍitaṁ kalmaṣāpaham;
Śravaṇamaṅgalaṁ śrīmadātataṁ
bhuvi gṛṇanti te bhūridā janāḥ.

You and Your own words are *amṛta,* nectar; *tapta-jīvanam,* for us who are burning in day-to-day life; *kavibhir-īḍitam,* honoured by great sages; *kalmaṣāpaham,* destroyer of all evils; *śravaṇa-maṅgalam,* sweet to hear; *śrīmadātatam,* full of *śrī,* that brings well-being and peace; *gṛṇanti te bhūridā janāḥ,* those who spread Your message are the greatest givers in charity.

Indeed, that is the greatest work we can do. In this modern age, Sri Ramakrishna ap-

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peared, and M. — Mahendranath Gupta — begins the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* with these words of the *Bhāgavatam*. The *Kathamrita* today gives us a wonderful picture of a pure, holy life, full of infinite compassion, love and peace.

In the second verse of the thirty-second chapter [*skandha* 10], Krishna comes to play with the *Gopas* and *Gopis* in Vrindavan. There we find a unique description of Krishna as *'sākṣāt manmathamanmathaḥ'* — He is the *manmatha* of *manmatha*. Who is *Manmatha*? *Manmatha* is the Greek Cupid or *Kāmadeva*, who attracts everybody to the worldly life. But what is to be noted is that Krishna Himself is attracting *Manmatha* towards Him. Two such expressions are there: One is *'manmathamanmathaḥ'*. The other is in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* where Atman is described as the 'death of death'. Why? Because death will die before the Atman.

Uniqueness of the human form

Then you come to the eleventh *skandha*. Here Krishna is about to depart from this world. Uddhava, His great friend and devotee, tells Krishna: 'Before you go, give us some spiritual advice. We want to hear this from You.' So Krishna gives various teachings to Uddhava. I want to refer to two verses in particular. The first one is about the uniqueness of the human form:

Sṛṣṭvā purāṇi vividhānyajayā''tmaśaktyā
vṛkṣān sarīsṛpapaśūn khagadaṁśamatsyān;
Taistairatuṣṭahṛdayaḥ puruṣaṁ vidhāya
brahmāvalokadhiṣaṇaṁ mudamāpa devaḥ.
—(XI.9.28)

This verse signifies that Brahman projected this universe — first cosmic, then organic — at various levels of evolution. But He was not satisfied with all these animals, serpents, fish, trees, etc. Why? Because He thought that if He entered into these bodies, He would not be able to recognize Himself. So, *'puruṣam vidhāya'* — then He projected the human form. As soon as He projected a human form, *'mudamāpa devaḥ'* — He was very happy because He thought that in that body He could rediscover Himself. That is the uniqueness of the human form.

Then comes the next verse:

Labdhvā sudurlabhamidaṁ bahusambhavānte
mānuṣyamarthadamanityamapīha dhīraḥ;
Tūrṇaṁ yateta na patedanumṛtyu yāvan-
niḥśreyasāya viṣayaḥ khalu sarvataḥ syāt.
—(XI.9.29)

You find here what biologist Julian Huxley wanted — the science of human possibilities. This verse says that with great difficulty, after a long process of evolution, we have got this human body — *'labdhvā sudurlabhamidam'*. So, human beings are very rare. *'Bahusambhavante'* — after long stages of evolution we have come. *'Manuṣyam'*, this human body; *'arthadam'*, is capable of yielding great resources; *'anityam apīha'*, though it will not last long. If you use it properly, it will be a great resource — *arthadam*. What shall we try for? *Niḥśreyasāya*, to get freedom. Be free. Animals are not free. They are controlled by nature. But in the human system we have some freedom to work out our own destiny. Nature of course plays some part; but we can go beyond nature. Our own true nature is divine. So, *'tūrṇam yateta'*, the sooner you struggle to achieve that freedom, that *niḥśreyasaḥ*, that *mokṣa*, the better. Why? Because any moment our body may go. If you peg yourself to sensory life which all animal species also have, then where is the difference between a man and a lower animal? The difference lies in our attempt to go beyond the sensory level.

Unfortunately, most modern men and women do not know anything beyond the sense-life. Pleasures and material comforts have mesmerized us, as it were. If this trend continues, the whole civilization will collapse as did the Roman civilization. Swami Vivekananda therefore warned the West that unless

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it makes spirituality its aim in life, its civilization will not last. Science and technology cannot give us values. Values cannot come from the body either. This body is composed of the genes which are by nature selfish; they cannot think of other people. So, we have to overcome this attachment to the body, to the senses and attain something higher and abiding. We have to seek an answer to the question: what lies above the sensory level? India got the answer from the Upanishads long, long ago. There is one passage (I.iii.10-11) in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* that says that our body has muscular energy, but it is very ordinary, very gross. Inside the nervous system there is a little more subtle energy. Still deeper is psyche. That is more subtle and has more energy. Thus, we find that human resources are organized on an ascending scale of subtlety, immensity, and inwardness. And the highest is the Atman.

The *Chhāndogya Upaniṣad* says, *'Tat tvam asi'* — You are That. You are not the tiny genetic system. You are that Infinite Atman, that is your true nature. This great teaching is also stressed by the *Bhāgavatam*. It gives us that teaching through the path of *bhakti*. Through *bhakti* we can achieve the highest spiritual realization. But *bhakti*, as pointed out earlier, has many dimensions. Ordinary *bhakti* also is *bhakti;* but it can go higher and higher, grow more and more. That is what is called progress in spiritual life or *ādhyātmika vikāsa*. But often we forget this truth. We had forgotten this truth for the last thousand years. You frequently find that a man who has been going to temples for years remains the same. His conduct and behaviour do not improve. What is the use of such going to temples? We have to have dynamic spirituality. Our spiritual consciousness has to be awakened and gradually raised. *'Tomāder caitanya hoak'* — May you become spiritually conscious! — that was how Sri Ramakrishna blessed every person. The *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* also emphasizes this idea again and again.

No conflict between science and spirituality

In India you do not find conflict between physical science and spirituality. This comes from Krishna's own mouth in the eleventh *skandha* of the *Bhāgavatam* in these three verses.

First,

Prāyeṇa manujā loke
lokatattvavicakṣaṇāḥ;
Samuddharanti hyātmānam-
ātmanaivāśubhāśayāt. (XI.7.19)

This means, generally speaking, human beings in this world are capable of building up their own life, they can understand the nature of the world in which they live. That is science. And *'samuddharanti hi ātmānam'* — a man upraises himself from a lower state to a higher state through this kind of enquiry. *'Ātmanaiva'* — by himself, not depending upon A, B, or C. No God is sitting over there to help you. This is all in the first *śloka*.

The second *śloka* states:

Ātmano gururātmaiva
puruṣasya viśeṣataḥ;
Yat pratyakṣānumānābhyāṁ
śreyo'sāvanuvindate. (XI.7.20)

Man's guru is his own self, while an animal's guru is nature. Man is his own master. He can develop himself. How does he do so? Through scientific method and scientific temper of induction, deduction — by *'pratyakṣa-anumānābhyām'*. *Pratyakṣa* is direct perception. Take facts, collect data, then discuss, question them, and thus you get knowledge. That is how you attain self-mastery in this world. You may say you are doing this. But, is that all? Today most people say — that is all. But Krishna says, no. There is one more step. I, as a Divine Being, am in the heart of all. This human being can realize Me also.

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Therefore, the last *śloka* says:

Puruṣatve ca māṁ dhīrāḥ
sāṅkhyayogaviśāradāḥ;
Āvistarāṁ prapaśyanti
sarvaśaktyupabṛṁhitam. (XI.7.21)

Human beings can also realize Me hidden within them. '*Sāṅkhyayogaviśāradāḥ*' — the science of spirituality will give you knowledge of your own Infinite nature. Bhagavan Krishna states this in the *Bhāgavatam*, where the distinction between physical science and religion is abolished. In the West this distinction was always there. There science and religion were at loggerheads. Many scientists had to die as a result of that conflict, but people thought that was quite normal. That sort of attitude was accepted in the West, but not in India. Our country had developed science at the very beginning — thousands of years ago when Mathematics, Astronomy, Medicine, Surgery reached great heights. Even today they can stand comparison in scientific attitude with what is called modern science. However, our greatest discovery was the Infinite Atman within this human being. So, that is how the *Bhāgavatam* deals with this concept of harmony between science and spirituality.

In the twelfth and last *skandha* is a beautiful *śloka:*

Yaṁ brahmā varuṇendrarudramarutaḥ
stunvanti divyaiḥ stavaiḥ
Vedaiḥ sāṅgapadakramopaniṣadair-
gāyanti yaṁ sāmgāḥ;
Dhyānāvasthitatadgatena manasā
paśyanti yaṁ yogino
Yasyāntaṁ na viduḥ surāsuragaṇā
devāya tasmai namaḥ. (XII.13.1)

I salute that Divine Being Who is described in all the Vedas, Whom gods such as Brahma, Varuna, Indra and Rudra praise all the time, Whom a yogi sitting in meditation realizes in his own heart, Whose limit cannot be seen by anybody.

Conclusion

The *Bhāgavatam* is indeed a great holy book. It is popular throughout India. Sri Ramakrishna was also very fond of this book. But, as I said, our social life has not been much influenced by the teachings of the *Bhāgavatam*. In India, there is no dearth of spiritual teachings, but the social system is completely anti-Vedantic, anti-Upanishad and anti-*Gita*. To correct that is what must be done in the modern period; it is for this that Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Holy Mother, and others have come. We had problems no doubt; but these can be solved if those in high position have a little understanding, a bit of spirituality in them. Love for spirituality and love for the nation can bring a change in character. But love for oneself can bring only moral ruin. What has happened in India is that before Independence people loved the nation, they sacrificed everything for the nation. After Independence, we started loving ourselves. As a result, corruption started. What do we see in India today? Perfect corruption.

But, mind you, this is only a passing phase. People will understand the truth better in the future. I am sure, as Swamiji predicted, that India in the modern period is going to be greater than it ever was in the past. The whole world will look to India for spiritual inspiration. ☐

> Plunge into the world and learn the secret of work, and that is the way of Karma-Yoga. Do not fly away from the wheels of the world-machine, but stand inside it and learn the secret of work. Through proper work done inside, it is possible to come out. Through this machinery itself is the way out
>
> —*Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 181

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The Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati — Its Foundation and Role

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

Revered Maharaj worked for some years at Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. A senior monk and an erudite scholar of the Ramakrishna Order with vast experience in spreading Vedantic ideas and with many well-appreciated books and booklets on the subject of Vedanta to his credit, Revered Maharaj places in this illuminating article some significant thoughts on Advaita Vedanta which form the basis of Advaita Ashrama at Mayvati.

I. Introduction — The Formulation of Advaita Vedanta

From the very early times of the *Ṛg-Veda*, the origins of which are lost in the gloom of the immense past, the Vedic *Rishis* (the Seers of Vedic Mantras and Seers of Truth and Cosmic Reality) have sought for the origin of the Cosmic-Universe of many planes with its varieties of entities and beings —sub-human, human, and divine—, and the abiding Reality which is the Ground and Source of all. Their approach has been not only from a theological point of view, of a supreme supervising Personal Divine Being in the empyrean (*Yo adhyakṣaḥ parame vyoman*), but also, and especially, from the point of view of an infinite supreme Transpersonal Spiritual Reality (*Sat*), which was not only the source of all types of entities and beings but also permeated them through and through (*Ota-prota*), like water permeating ice.

Both these aspects are found in the Vedas, running side by side. The *Viśvakarma-Sūkta* (X.81), the *Hiraṇyagarbha-Sūkta* (X.121), the *Devī-Sūkta* (X.125), and others in the *Ṛg-Veda* are indicative of the theological approach.[1] The *Nāsadīya-Sūkta* (*Ṛg-Veda*, X.129), and the developing conceptions of *Māyā*, *Akṣara*, Brahman, Atman, *Puruṣa*, *Prakṛti*, *Ākāśa*, *Prāṇa*, etc. which find their maturity in the Upanishads, are indicative of the transpersonal philosophical approach. The *Puruṣa-Sūkta* (*Ṛg-Veda*, X.90) forms a link between the theological and the philosophical approaches, where the *Puruṣa* Himself is partly the Cosmic Being (*Virāṭ*), embodying the entire cosmos, and also transcends it infinitely

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1. The Vedic theological approach is based on enquiry and hence somewhat philosophical in nature. There is a gradual growth, refinement, and spiritualization in the conception. It is quite distinct from that of the Semetic religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which envisage the creation of the universe dogmatically out of nothing by God's will. God's existence is also assumed by them *a priori*, without any enquiry as to His being and nature. According to Vedic thought, the Infinite Spiritual Reality does not exist, *but is Existence itself*. The Personal 'God' exists, like other beings and entities, and in relation to them. They all participate in Existence (*Sat*). 'God' is a manifested aspect of the Infinite Spiritual Reality. Being Himself an existing *individual* apart from the others, though 'almighty', He is limited by Space-Time-Causation in His activities. He can, however, co-ordinate and regulate the other existing entities and beings, which are all the manifestations of the Infinite Spiritual Reality. They all, including the Personal 'God', arise from the Infinite Spiritual Reality and merge back into It, like waves into the sea, when the manifestation is withdrawn.

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besides (*Pādo-asya viśvā-bhūtāni, tripād-asya amṛtaṁ divi*). He is the cosmic aspect of the trans-personal Infinite Spiritual Reality encompassing all the cosmic entities and beings, including all the great gods and goddesses. The various Divinities in Nature, such as Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni, Sūrya, and others, all arise from the different aspects of the same Infinite Spiritual Reality. The *Ṛg-Veda* (I.164.46) declares: 'The Reality (*Sat*) is One; sages allude to It in different ways.' (*Ekam Sat, Viprā bahudhā vadanti*).

Thus, the theological and the philosophical approaches gradually get integrated in the Upanishads and culminate in the profound and comprehensive philosophic vision of the Vedas, known as the Vedanta (the 'End product of the Vedas'). It reaches its acme in Advaita, which affirms the non-dual character of the totality of Existence manifested on physical, mental and spiritual levels. They are all different aspects of the same Infinite Trans-personal Spiritual Reality, which is of the nature of SAT-CIT-ĀNANDA (ABSOLUTE EXISTENCE-CONSCIOUSNESS-BLISS), designated as Brahman. The glory of Advaita is, it not only affirms this non-dual Infinite Spiritual Reality,[2] but also declares that, being the Ground and Source of all, it can be realized by all in the core of their own being as their inmost Self (*Pratyak-Atman*). For such realization, it also lays down several paths — known as Yogas — to suit the varying temperaments and aptitudes of the aspirants.

II. The Comprehensiveness of Vedanta

Though Advaita Vedanta affirms the trans-personal Brahman as the ultimate Reality, It being the source as well as the permeating Reality of all manifested existence, it also has a great place on the phenomenal plane for the Personal aspect of Brahman — Brahman in association with Its innate relativistic *Māyā* power (*Māyā-Śakti*) — known as *Īśvara*, the Inner-Controller (*Antar-yāmin*) of the Universe, which manifests the Cosmic-Universe and its beings on the substratum of Brahman. The Cosmic-Universe forms as it were the body of *Īśvara*. The realization of the Trans-personal Brahman as the Atman within, transcending one's phenomenal external personality, is for those of rational temperament and contemplatives, who seek the Truth as much behind the manifested universe as of their own personality. But, for those who have an emotional or extrovert temperament, *Īśvara* serves the purpose of 'God' for offering devotion and dedicated service, under any desired external divine name and form, the whole universe being His body. The universe also is Brahman Itself, as declared in the Upanishads, being Its manifestation (Cf. *Brahmaeva viśvam-idaṁ variṣṭham — Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, II.11; *Sarvaṁ khalu idaṁ Brahma — Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, VI.1). So, dedicated service for the good of the world in a spirit of worship of *Īśvara* is also advocated. Thus, Vedanta, in its three aspects of Dvaita (Dualism), Viśiṣṭa-advaita (Qualified Non-dualism), and Advaita (Pure Non-dualism), provides spiritual paths for people with different abilities and aptitudes which can be adopted by people professing different religions as well.

We may say that the Vedic theological approach, with a Personal God, represents Dvaita; the *Puruṣa-Sūkta* stage, with the entire Cosmic Universe as His body, represents the Viśiṣṭa-advaita; and the philosophical approach, with the Trans-personal Spiritual Reality, the Advaita.

In a letter to Alasinga Perumal on 6 May 1895, Swami Vivekananda pointed out the universality and versatility of Vedanta:

2. Advaita (Non-duality) means, there are no two realities, and that God, Souls, and the Universe (*Īśvara-Jīvas-Jagat*) are the phenomenal manifestations in Space-Time-Causation of the same Infinite Trans-personal Spiritual Reality, Brahman, by virtue of Its imponderable *Māyā-Power*, and are identical with Brahman in their true nature. They arise, exist, and merge back in time in that abiding spiritual Ground Reality.

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Now I will tell you my discovery. All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary. This is the essential of religion: the Vedanta, applied to the various ethnic customs and creeds of India, is Hinduism. The first stage, i.e. Dvaita, applied to the ideas of the ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity; as applied to the Semitic groups, Mohammedanism. The Advaita, as applied in its Yoga-perception form, is Buddhism etc. Now by religion is meant the Vedanta; the applications must vary according to the different needs, surroundings, and other circumstances of different nations. You will find that although the philosophy is the same, the Shaktas, Shaivas, etc. apply it each to their own special cult and *forms*. Now, in your journal [*Brahmavadin*, Madras] ... preach the philosophy, the spiritual part, and let people suit it to their own forms.[3]

III. The Development of the Vedanta System

Thus the Vedantic thought, beginning with the *Ṛg-Veda*, gradually developed into the comprehensive and grand Vedanta in the Upanishads, with Advaita as its 'swaying spire'. Bhagavan Bādarāyaṇa systematized this Vedantic philosophy in his famous *Sūtras* ('Threads', i.e., concize aphoristic statements) known as the *Vedānta-Sūtras* or the *Brahma-Sūtras* (also *Śārīraka-Sūtras*), basing on its subject-matter (*Śārīraka* refers to the Atman within). It was given to the great and illustrious Acharya Shankara to place this Vedanta philosophy on the firm foundations — the *Prasthāna-traya* (the 'Three broad and solid Foundations'), namely, *Śruti* (the Vedas with the Upanishads), the *Brahma-Sūtras*, and the *Bhagavad-Gītā*—, by writing profound and integrative commentaries on them, harmonizing all its aspects and systematizing them rationally.

Acharya Shankara possessed a rational and scientific mind. He knew that any philosophy, to be valid, must fulfil three criteria: (1) It must be based on facts; (2) It must be rationally presented; and, (3) It must be verifiable in experience. Then only it will be true and practical. So, he took the basis of Advaita philosophy—the spiritual truths realized and revealed by the *Rishis* in the Upanishads—as the hypothesis; the rational system based on them and inculcated in the *Brahma-Sūtras*, resolving all objections and contradictions, by Badarayana, and reinforced by his own powerful reasoning and appeal to experience, as the basis for presentation; and, for verification through personal experience by others as the clinching proof, he resorted to the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, which delineates, for the realization of the spiritual truths inculcated in the Upanishads, several Yogic paths suited to people with different abilities and aptitudes. In the invocatory verses of the *Gītā*, the work has been characterized as 'showering the elixir of Advaita' (*Advaita-amṛta-varṣiṇī*), and it has been compared to the nectarean milk yielded by the Upanishads as the cows, with Bhagavan Sri Krishna Himself as the cowherd milking the Upanishadic-cows. Hence, the *Gītā* has acquired the epithet '*Bhagavad-Gītā*'. The Upanishads give us the Vedanta, i.e. *Brahma-Vidyā*/*Ātma-Vidyā* — the facts and theories about the Spiritual Reality; and the *Gītā* gives us the Yogas, the practical methods of realizing them. As such the *Gītā* is known as the *Yoga-śāstra* or *Sādhana-śāstra* (the Science of Yoga or Practical Application to realize the Truth). As the *Gītā* harmonizes the different ideals and paths, it is also called the *Samanvaya-śāstra* (Science of Harmony).

Sri Shankara emphasizes over and over again in his works that the Self or Atman has

3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, vols. 1 to 8, 1989; vol. 9, 1997), vol. 5, pp. 81–2. [Hereafter *CW.*]

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to be realized through *Śruti* (Revelation in the Vedas), *Yukti* (Reasoning) and *Svānubhūti* (One's own experience).[4] Corresponding to these three aspects, the Vedas themselves inculcate the method of *Śravaṇa* (Listening to the spiritual truths in the *Śruti*), *Manana* (Reflection on them through reasoning), and *Nididhyāsana* (Concentrated practice to realize them).[5] The modern scientific principles of collection and classification of facts, hypothesis based on them, and experimental verification, reflect these very methods.

Thus, Acharya Shankara established the unshakable Advaita system on rational and scientific lines based on the *Prasthāna-traya*, which has been drawing encomiums from saints and savants alike, both in the East and the West. Many have realized and confirmed the Advaitic Truths from ages past to the present days.

IV. Swami Vivekananda and Advaita Vedanta

Vedanta has been ruling the minds and hearts of people in India for scores of centuries; and now, in its Advaitic form, it is permeating the West and other parts of the world as well, as a result of the great work of Swami Vivekananda in spreading the Vedanta in the context of modern science all over the world towards the end of the last century. Vedanta is highly and very aptly relevant in this age, and is also a necessary corrective to the lopsided materialistic outlook of modern science.[6]

The great Buddha taught Advaita in his own spiritual way, though his approach was negative and exclusive — *Neti, Neti.* Amarasimha of the 4th century, in his lexicographic work *Amarakoṣa*, gives '*Advayavādi*' as one of Buddha's epithets. Acharya Shankara established the philosophy of Advaita on rational and scientific lines in a positive all-inclusive way — *Iti, Iti*, showing that Brahman Itself appears as *Īśvara*, the Souls and the universe (*Īśvara-Jīva-Jagat*) by virtue of Its *Māyā*-power, and everyone can realize Brahman as the Self within (Atman). And it was given to Swami Vivekananda to establish Advaita in the modern scientific context and bring out its practical beneficial implications to lift up the

4. Acharya Shankara says in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*: 'In the realization of the Atman, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, through the breaking of one's connection with the bondage of *Avidyā* or Ignorance, the Scriptures, reasoning and the words of the Guru are the proofs, while one's own experience gained by concentrating the mind is the ultimate proof. ...Knowledge of the Atman to others is a mere inference. The Gurus as well as the Scriptures instruct the disciple standing aloof; while the man of realization crosses *Avidyā* (his ignorance of Truth) through illumination alone. ...Himself knowing his indivisible Self through his own realization, and thus becoming perfect, a man should stand face to face with the Atman, with his mind free from all doubts and contradictions' (verses 474–7). 'Realizing thy Self as the Self of all beings by means of Scripture, reasoning, and thy own realization, do away with thy superimposition (that you are the body)' (*Śrutyā, yuktyā, svānubhūtyā jñātvā sārvātmyam ātmanaḥ....* verse 281).

5. 'O Maitreyi, dear, this Atman is to be *seen;* it must be heard about from the Scripture, should be reflected upon, and must be realized through concentrated practice. By perfectly realizing this Atman, O dear one, by seeing, by hearing, by reflection, all this manifested phenomena becomes known' (*Ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ, śrotavyo, mantavyo, nididhyāsitavyaḥ. Ātmano vā are darśanena, śravaṇena, matyā vijñānena idaṁ sarvaṁ viditam — Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad,* IV.5).

6. For a detailed treatment of this subject, see this author's books: *Vedanta in the Context of Modern Science (A Comparative Study)* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1997); and *Vedanta, the Science of Integral Reality, Vis-a-Vis Modern Science* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1998).

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life of mankind and resolve its conflicts on the basis of the unity of existence, and the solidarity and divinity of humanity. Swamiji integrated in his life and thought, '*the heart of the Buddha and the intellect of Shankara*'. He declared, '*I have a message to the West, as Buddha had a message to the East*', and delivered that message with the Buddha's compassion, basing it on Advaita, rationally and scientifically established by Shankara, and realized and demonstrated in the present age in the life of his Guru Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of Divinity and religious harmony; under his guidance, he himself realized the Advaita in all its bearings. Vivekananda sang of Sri Ramakrishna in a hymn,

> I take refuge in Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Guru, the physician for the ailments of the world, whose mind is ever established in Advaita, who wears externally the luminous vesture of devotion in life and expressions, and is ever engaged in wonderful activities that bring peace and joy to mankind.[7]

At the very commencement of his work in America, in his 'Paper on Hinduism' presented at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in September 1893, Swamiji mentioned about the '*high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes*'.

In a letter to Alasinga Perumal on 17 February 1896 from New York, Swami Vivekananda declared:

> The dry, abstract Advaita must become living — poetic — in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogi-ism must come the most scientific and practical psychology — and all this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life's work.[8]

And all through his extensive lectures, talks, and classes in the West as well as in India, and also in his writings and letters, he never failed to point out the rational and scientific character of Indian thought, especially of Advaita Vedanta and the Yogas. He emphasized their role in the uplift of humanity and in meeting the challenges of materialism and atheism. He pointed out that these were not only in harmony with modern science, but also gave support to ethics and religion and harmonized their different points of view.

In his letter to Mohammed Sarfaraz Hussain of Almora on 16 June 1898, Vivekananda pointed out:

> Whether we call it Vedantism or any *ism*, the truth is that Advaitism is the last word of religion and thought and the only position from which one can look upon all religions and sects with love. I believe it is the religion of the future enlightened humanity.[9]

Being the totality of Reality, Advaita has a receptive and harmonious outlook towards different expressions and view-points, and is not opposed to any. The great Gauḍapādācārya, the grand-Guru of Sri Shankara, has pointed out in his *Māṇḍūkya-Kārikā* (III.18,17):

> *Advaitaṁ parama-artho hi,*
> *Dvaitaṁ tat bheda ucyate;*
> *Parasparaṁ viruḍhyante,*
> *taiḥ ayaṁ na viruḍhyate.*
>
> *Advaita, the Non-dual Reality, verily is the Supreme Truth, and all Dvaita (the dualistic systems) are modes of its phenomenal expression. The Dualists, seeking to establish their own systems, come to conflict among themselves, but the Advaita has no conflict with any of them.*

In his lecture on 'The Mission of the Vedanta' at Kumbhakonam in South India in 1897, pointing out the harmony between Vedanta and Science, Vivekananda said:

> It seems clear that the conclusions of modern materialistic science can be acceptable, harmoniously with their relig-

7. Cf. *CW*, vol. 8, p. 175.
8. *CW*, vol. 5, pp. 104–5.
9. *CW*, vol. 6, p. 415.

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ion, only to the Vedantins or Hindus as they are called. It seems clear that modern materialism can hold its own and at the same time approach spirituality by taking up the conclusions of the Vedanta. It seems to us, and to all who care to know, that the conclusions of modern science are the very conclusions of the Vedanta reached ages ago; only, in modern science they are written in the language of matter. This then is another claim of the Vedanta upon modern Western minds, its rationality, the wonderful rationalism of the Vedanta. I have myself been told by some of the best Western scientific minds of the day, how wonderfully rational the conclusions of the Vedanta are. I know one of them personally who scarcely has time to eat his meal or go out of his laboratory, but who yet would stand by the hour to attend my lectures on the Vedanta; for, as he expresses it, they are so scientific, they so exactly harmonize with the aspirations of the age and with the conclusions to which modern science is coming at the present time.[10]

V. The Advaita Ashrama — Its conception and practical shape

It is this rational and scientific aspect of Vedanta, especially Advaita Vedanta, presented by Vivekananda, which enquires into a Trans-personal Infinite Spiritual Reality, while providing for a Personal God of religion on the phenomenal plane for devotion and adoration, that appealed to the modern minds of the scientific West, who were tired of the dogmatism of Semetic religious faiths in the West. Many became the admirers of his thought, and some became intimate disciples, ready to dedicate themselves to the propagation of Advaitic ideals. Among these good and dedicated Western admirers and disciples were the Hale family of Chicago, Mrs. Ole Bull, Miss Josephine MacLeod, Miss Christine Greenstidel, Miss S.E. Waldo, Mrs. Funke, Mrs. Bagley, Mr. and Mrs. Francis Leggett, Charles Lyson, Leon Landsberg, and several others from U.S.A., and J.J. Goodwin, Miss Henrietta Müller, Mr. E.T. Sturdy, Miss Margaret Noble, Capt. and Mrs. J.H. Sevier, and others from England. They were highly devoted to him and his teachings. Goodwin took shorthand notes and reproduced Swamiji's lectures and talks; Capt. and Mrs. Sevier left with Swamiji for India in December 1896 to assist in his work; they were followed a little later by Miss Margaret Noble and Miss Christine Greenstidel.

Finding this great enthusiasm among the Westerners in general, and among the Western disciples who were ready to follow him, the thought began to arise in the mind of Swami Vivekananda to establish an Ashrama in the cool of the Himalayas for the cultivation of Advaita, where his Western disciples and admirers could stay and carry on their *Sādhanā* (Spiritual Practice) free from the heat of the plains of India.

It was in June 1896 that the Seviers first attended his lectures in London. 'What was the surprise of the devoted couple to find, on comparing notes, that when hearing the Swami they had each felt intuitively and simultaneously: "This is the man and this is the philosophy that we have been seeking in vain all through our life!" What appealed to them most was the Advaita philosophy; but the personality of the Swami also captivated them. The very first time they met him in private, he addressed Mrs. Sevier as "Mother" and asked her, "Would you not like to come to India? I will give you of my best realizations."'[11] Capt. and Mrs. Sevier disposed of most of their belongings and were ready to go with Swamiji to India when he was preparing to leave for India.

In July 1896, Capt. and Mrs. Sevier and Miss Henrietta Müller planned a tour and a

10. *CW*, vol. 3, p. 185.

11. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981), vol. 2, p. 113. [Hereafter *Life*.]

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holiday on the Continent (Europe) for providing rest to Swamiji from his strenuous work and exertion. It was when they were touring in the Alpine regions of Switzerland that the idea of an Ashrama in the Himalayas for the dedicated Westerners began to take shape in Swamiji's mind.

It was in these Himalayas of Europe that the Swami spoke to those who were to be the founders of the Advaita Ashrama and to dedicate their lives to it, of his cherished dream of establishing a monastery in the heart of his own beloved Himalayas. Even before starting on this tour, he had written from London to the Hale sisters (of Chicago): 'I am going with three English friends to the Swiss Hills. Later on, towards the end of winter I expect to go to India with some English friends who are going to live in my monastery there, which, by the by, is in the air yet. It is struggling to materialize somewhere in the Himalayas.' Now in the Alpine snows he cried: 'Oh, I long for such a monastery where I can retire from the labours of my life and pass the rest of my days in meditation. It will be the centre for work and meditation, where my Indian and Western disciples can live together. I shall train them as workers, the former to go out as preachers of Vedanta to the West, and the latter to devote their lives to the good of India.' A thought, something akin to a vision, also crossed the minds of the Seviers; and the Captain, speaking for himself and his wife exclaimed, 'We must have such a monastery!' At the time, it seemed only a passing remark, but as the months went by, those words spoken in the midst of the Alps were seen to have been prophetic. So deep had the idea sunk into the hearts of these two disciples that within three years the Swami's great desire was fulfilled through their practical help and co-operation.[12]

The idea and need of having a monastery in a cool, secluded region of the Himalayas, where East and West could meet on an equal footing of love and unity of purpose, exchange with each other their own highest ideals and practise the Advaita teaching were much in the Swami's thought. He had written that this monastery must be about 7,000 feet above sea-level, since he did not want to make it too difficult for his Western disciples coming to work for his cause in India, by forcing on them the Indian mode of living in the fiery heat of the plains. On his tours he had himself looked for a suitable site in the hills in and around Dharmashala, Murree, Srinagar, Dehra Dún, and the town of Almora, but had found nothing to answer satisfactorily to his purpose. When he went to Kashmir, he left the matter in the hands of Capt. and Mrs. Sevier. With Swami Swarupananda (his young Indian disciple, and new Editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata*), they made a tour into the interior of Almora District. In the course of an extensive and diligent search they came on the beautiful estate of Mayavati with its thickly wooded hills, spread over an area ranging from 6,000 to 7,000 feet elevation, the site for the Ashrama being at 6,400 feet. It was fifty miles east of Almora and commanded a magnificent view of the snow ranges in a crescent. They decided at once that it was *the* spot for starting the proposed Advaita Ashrama and having a permanent home for the *Prabuddha Bharata*. The purchase was promptly made (from the estate owner, one Mr. McGregor) and *they established it as their retreat on March 19, 1899, the day on which the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was publicly celebrated that year. The Advaita Ashrama was founded with the full-hearted blessings of Swami Vivekananda and under his guidance.*[13]

The *Prabuddha Bharata*, which had been started in Madras in July 1896 under the editorship of the young talented Rajam Iyer, was

12. *Life*, vol. 2, pp. 117-8.

13. *Life*, vol. 2, p. 131.

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transferred to Almora, on Rajam Iyer's premature death, under the editorship of Swami Swarupananda, and was run from 'Thompson House' with the help of the Seviers. The first issue came out in August 1898. They had acquired a hand-press for printing purposes. On the journal's transfer to Almora, Swamiji had sent them a poem for encouragement in August 1898 with the title 'To the Awakened India' (i.e. *Prabuddha Bharata*) from Srinagar in Kashmir. We quote a few verses from it here as they are significant for the Advaita ideal:

Once more awake!
For sleep it was, not death,
to bring thee life
Anew, and rest to lotus-eyes for visions
Daring yet. The world in need awaits,
O Truth!
No death for thee!
Resume thy march,
With gentle feet that would not break the
Peaceful rest even of the roadside dust
That lies so low. Yet strong and steady,
Blissful, bold, and free. Awakener, ever
Forward! Speak thy stirring words.
Thy home is gone,
Where loving hearts had brought thee up
and
Watched with joy thy growth.
But Fate is strong—
This is the law—all things come back
to the source
They sprung, their strength to renew.
Then start afresh
From the land of thy birth,
where vast cloud-belted
Snows do bless and put their strength
in thee,
For working wonders new. The heavenly
River tune thy voice to her own
immortal song;
Deodar shades give thee eternal peace.
...
Then speak, O Love!
Before thy gentle voice serene, behold how
Visions melt and fold on fold of dreams
Departs to void, till Truth and Truth alone
In all its glory shines—
And tell the world—
Awake, arise, and dream no more!
This is the land of dreams, where Karma
Weaves unthreaded garlands
with our thoughts
Of flowers sweet or noxious, and none
Has root or stem, being born in naught,
which
The softest breath of Truth drives back to
Primal nothingness. Be bold, and face
The Truth! Be one with it!
Let visions cease,
Or, if you cannot, dream but truer dreams,
Which are Eternal Love and Service Free.[14]

On the establishment of the Advaita Ashrama, the press too was moved to Mayavati forthwith.

In certain aspects the Advaita Ashrama is unique among the institutions started under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda. The following lines, which he wrote to the joint-founders of the Ashrama, set forth its ideals and principles.

> In Whom is the Universe, Who is in the Universe, Who is the Universe; in Whom is the Soul, Who is in the Soul, Who is the Soul of Man; knowing Him — and therefore the Universe — as our Self, alone extinguishes all fear, brings an end to misery and leads to Infinite Freedom. Wherever there has been expansion in love or progress in well-being, of individuals or numbers, it has been through the perception, realization, and the practicalization of the Eternal Truth — *The Oneness of All Beings*. 'Dependence is misery. Independence is happiness.' The Advaita is the only system which gives unto man complete possession of himself, takes off all dependence and its associated superstitions, thus making us brave to suffer, brave to do, and in the long run attain to Absolute Freedom.

14. CW, vol. 4, pp. 387–9.

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Hitherto it has not been possible to preach this Noble Truth entirely free from the settings of dualistic weakness; this alone, we are convinced, explains why it has not been more operative and useful to mankind at large.

To give this ONE TRUTH a freer and fuller scope in elevating the lives of individuals and leavening the mass of mankind, we start this Advaita Ashrama on the Himalayan heights, the land of its first expiration.

Here it is hoped to keep Advaita free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations. Here will be taught and practised nothing but the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple; and though in entire sympathy with all other systems, this Ashrama is dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone.[15]

In this Ashrama there is no external worship of God by means of images, pictures, or symbols, nor any religious ceremony or ritual, except the *Viraja Homa* (Purificatory Sacrifice for ordaining a monk) — not even the worship of Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Guru, which is central in the life of the other monastic centres of the Ramakrishna Order.[16]

Before he left on his second visit to the West in June 1899, Swami Vivekananda, in response to a request, agreed to send four of his disciples to help in the work of the Ashrama to assist Swami Swarupananda and the Seviers. Within a week of his departure, Swamis Sachchidananda (senior), Virajananda and Vimalananda, and Brahmachari Harendranath, left Belur Math to take up enthusiastically their new duties, which, then, were mainly the repair/construction of a building for the monks, road-making, agricultural work, and helping in the publication of the journal.

It may be mentioned that the Mayavati area was a tea-estate. Fruits common in cold regions like apples, apricots, *naspatis* (pears), etc. grew plentifully, and the forests all around were full of pine, oak, and rhododendron trees full of crimson flowers, as though the forest were on fire. Bears, tigers, and other wild animals frequented the area. All types of birds flocked the area with their chirping, cooing, and call, often very sweet. Heavy snowfall was usual in winter.

Mayavati has its charm both for its Advaita Ashrama with the peaceful atmosphere and stately Deodars and the famous snow-clad Himalayan peaks, forming a big crescent around Mayavati at a distance. Mrs. Sevier lived there for many years, and her residence with the stately Deodars in front was known as *'Mother's Bungalow'*.

The Ashrama was situated in a forest, and the nearest small village Phūrti was about 4 kms. away, and the small market town of Lohāghāt about 5 kms. further on from Phurti. In another direction, the Tehsil town Champāvat was about 9 kms. away. There were no regular roads, but only bridle-paths till recently. In due course, a small dispensary [which is now a hospital] was established with a few beds as a work of service to the villagers in the hills and it is very popular. Guest-houses have come up to accommodate the constant flow of visitors from all parts of India and abroad.

VI. Swami Vivekananda's visit to Mayavati

Capt. Sevier laid down his life of service

15. *Life*, vol. 2, p. 432; *CW*, vol. 5, pp. 435–6.
16. It may be noted that it is for the first time in history that Swami Vivekananda conceived of an *Advaita Ashrama*. Though Acharya Shankara and others have established Maths for the cultivation of Advaita, they were not called 'Advaita Ashramas', but 'Shankara Maths'. They also practise dualistic disciplines. After the establishment of the Advaita Ashrama by Swamiji, in the Ramakrishna Order, two other Advaita Ashramas have come into being, one at Varanasi (1902) and the other at Kalady (1936) in Kerala. But they follow dualistic method with temples for the worship of Sri Ramakrishna.

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and *Sādhanā* at Mayavati on 28 October 1900. Swami Vivekananda paid a visit to Mayavati to console Mrs. Sevier and encourage the inmates of the Ashrama. He was still in the West during his second trip and had hastened to India because his mind had been telling him that Mr. Sevier was seriously ill; moreover he wanted to meet him anyhow. On arrival at Belur Math (near Calcutta) on 9 December 1900, he learnt of the passing away of his beloved disciple. He left Calcutta on 27 December to go to Mayavati though it was severe winter and the journey from Kāṭhgodām to Mayavati in the hills would be hazardous, with heavy snow fall and rain in the season. Kathgodam, the nearest railway station, was sixty-five miles away. But he was determined to go, and the enterprising inmates of the Advaita Ashrama managed his journey making the needed arrangements under the leadership of Swami Virajananda, who had engaged some *dandy*-men and coolies at high rates. Swamiji arrived at Kathgodam at midnight on 28 December and reached Mayavati by stages on 3 January 1901, travelling by *dandy* in snow and rain.

On 6 January, Swamiji wrote to Mrs. Bull from Mayavati:

> Mrs. Sevier is a strong woman, and has borne her loss quietly and bravely. ...This place is very, very beautiful, and they have made it simply exquisite. It is a huge place several acres in area, and is very well kept. ...It is snowing heavily here, and I was caught in a blizzard on the way;... Today I walked over the snow uphill about a mile, seeing Mrs. Sevier's lands; she has made beautiful roads all over. Plenty of gardens, fields, orchards, and large forests, all in her land. The living houses are so simple, so clean, and so pretty, and above all so suited for the purpose.... PS. Kali has taken two sacrifices; the cause has already two European martyrs [Mr. Goodwin and Capt. Sevier]. Now, it is going to rise up splendidly.[17]

Swamiji spent some fifteen eventful days in Mayavati giving inspiration to all. He wrote several articles besides letters. One day going round the Ashrama building, he found that they had set up a shrine for Sri Ramakrishna in a room and regular worship was being conducted. He said nothing at the time, but that evening when all were gathered about the fireplace, he spoke vehemently, disapproving of ritual worship in an Advaita Ashrama. 'It should never have been done....' As a result the worship was discontinued, and ultimately the shrine was abolished on 18 March 1902. Later, some inmates of the Ashrama referred the matter to Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, seeking her guidance. The Holy Mother supported Swamiji's viewpoint saying that Sri Ramakrishna was an Advaitin and we are all Advaitins. She wrote from Jayrambati in September 1902, '*One who is our Guru (Sri Ramakrishna), he is Advaita. Since you are all his disciples, you too are Advaitins. I can emphatically say, you are surely* Advaitavādins....'[18]

VII. The Development and Role of Advaita Ashrama

It may be noted that the area where the Advaita Ashrama was established was originally known as '*Māyāpaṭ*', in the name perhaps of a local folk-goddess. It conveniently yielded to be renamed '*Māyāvati*' (the *Abode of* Māyā), *Māyā* being a feminine word in Sanskrit. Mayavati has a great significance for Advaita. The Advaitic (Non-dual) Trans-personal Infinite Brahman manifests on the phenomenal plane as the Universe and its beings through Its innate *Māyā-Power* (*Māyā-Śakti*), symbolizing the spread of Advaitic ideas all over the world from Mayavati, the Abode of Maya.

With small beginnings, the Advaita sapling planted at Mayavati by Swamiji, has, in due course, grown into a mighty *Sanātana-Aśvattha* (the Eternal Cosmic-Tree) of the

17. *CW*, vol. 5, pp. 151–2.

18. *Life*, vol. 2, p. 572.

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Kaṭha Upaniṣad (VI.1), representing Brahman, spreading its branches in the form of profound spiritual thoughts all over the world. It started with publishing the *Prabuddha Bharata* and some small booklets with a small handpress. Gradually, after the passing away of Swamiji, the Ashrama collected and published *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western Disciples in four volumes in its first edition, and also the first edition of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in four volumes (which has now grown into nine volumes) to which Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble) wrote a masterly and inspiring Introduction. In due course, the publications and the journal grew so much in quantity and quality, that the necessity of shifting the publication department of *Prabuddha Bharata* to Calcutta was keenly felt and was given effect to in 1924. However, the editorial department of the *Prabuddha Bharata* has been maintained at Mayavati all along. It is actively continuing there, and has become known all over the world. The Advaita Ashrama branch at Calcutta has become one of the leading publishers in English of the Ramakrishna Order literature and the works on Vedanta and other scriptural texts in English and in Sanskrit with English translations. The *Prabuddha Bharata* completed its one hundred years in 1996.[19]

In his Introduction to the pamphlet recording Swami Vivekananda's address at the Harvard University at Boston on 'Vedanta Philosophy' in March 1896, Reverend E.C. Everett, Dean of the Harvard Divine School, wrote:

> ...We occidentals busy ourselves with the manifold. We can, however, have no understanding of the manifold, if we have no sense of the One in which the manifold exists. The reality of the One is the truth which the East may well teach us! and We owe a debt of gratitude to Vivekananda that he has taught this lesson so effectively.

We thus see the importance of Advaita to mankind in several aspects of life and to elevate it to divinity. Advaita was realized and the philosophy based on it was evolved in the Vedic days in the Himalayas, which is presided over by the all-renouncing beneficent Shiva. He appears as the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti*, teaching the highest Vedic Truths to the sages in silent meditation. It is significant that in modern times, under the guidance of the master of Advaita, the sage of Dakshineswar, the Great Guru Sri Ramakrishna, Advaita is to be spread all over the world for the all-round good of mankind by the Advaita Ashrama located in the Himalayas. It was established by Vivekananda, the great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, considered the very embodiment of Shiva (*Mūrta-Maheśvara*), the master of Renunciation and Discrimination (*Viveka*). From here will go waves of the highest thought which will in due course flood the whole world with the nectarean showers of Advaita (*Advaita-amṛta-varṣa*), even as the *Bhagavad-Gītā* is declared to do. Now it is going to rise up splendidly', Swami Vivekananda has predicted. ❐

19. The Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, had several illustrious Presidents like Swami Swarupananda, Virajananda, Madhavananda, and others, who also edited the *Prabuddha Bharata*. Besides these, the journal had some eminent editors like Swami Ashokananda, and others. They all ably accomplished the admirable growth and development of the Ashrama and the journal. Both the Ashrama and the journal are now well known all over the world in the relevant circles. A good number of monks who went to preach Vedanta in the West and made their mark had worked in the Advaita Ashrama, especially in the early days.

> He who knows Brahman attains the Supreme.
>
> —*Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, II.1.3

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Grasping the Essentials

SWAMI ADISWARANANDA

Swami Adiswarananda, Spiritual Leader of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, was previously the Editor of Prabuddha Bharata. *In this very illuminating article the learned Swami highlights those essentials of spiritual practice adhering to which one qualifies oneself to be called spiritual. Says he, 'Vedanta says that the root cause of all human problems is spiritual and offers spiritual solutions. It seeks to discover the spiritual truth often lost in the wilderness of superstitions, dogmas, and myths. It maintains that there will be nothing new if all the people of the world convert to Hinduism, or Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or any other religion. But certainly the world will be a different place if some rise above the walls of the non-essentials of religion and realize the essential truth. If Vedanta disturbs some, it is because its viewpoints challenge their prejudices and illusions. Knowledge of the essentials of Vedanta may be chimerical to those who are deluded by the trinkets and glitter of the world, but it is of utmost importance to the spiritual seekers who strive for the real truth.'*

The Essential and the Nonessential

The exhortation of Vedanta is: grasp the essentials. Vedanta is neither a speculative philosophy that indulges in endless sophistries, nor a teaching that promises miraculous solutions to the problems of life. It offers guidelines that are tested and verified. The spiritual guidelines of Vedanta are pragmatic, scientific and universal. They are pragmatic because they are problem solving; scientific because they can be verified by personal experience; and universal in that they apply to all, regardless of place and time. Vedanta invites critical inquiry, encourages honest doubt, and provides realistic explanations of the mysteries of spiritual quest.

According to Vedanta, spiritual quest has four parts: direct perception, philosophy, mythology, and rituals. Direct perception is the essential part of spiritual quest. Swami Vivekananda describes this essential as the following:

> Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy — by one, or more, or all of these — and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.[1]

Spiritual quest becomes meaningless when the essential part is forgotten or ignored.

The second part, philosophy, is an attempt to give us an intellectual understanding of spiritual truth based on pure reason. But pure reason requires a pure mind, which is so rare. Too often philosophical reasoning lapses into rationalization. Reason is invoked to justify our preconceived notions. Such reasoning moves in a circle, creates doubt, and never arrives at finality. Some say that philosophy teaches us to feel unhappy intelligently! The so-called rationalistic analysis of life yields conclusions that are uncertain and tentative. The human mind is never sure of its own judgements and convictions. All we

1. *Vivekananda: The Yoga and Other Works*, ed. Swami Nikhilananda (New York, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1996), p. 575. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 1, p. 124. [Hereafter, *Centenary Works.*]

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can trust about the human mind is that we cannot trust it. Even Darwin had doubts about human judgement. According to one writer:

> Darwin himself confessed to an 'inward conviction' that the universe was not the result of chance. 'But then,' he added, 'with me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?'[2]

The third part of spiritual quest, mythology, seeks to describe the indescribable Ultimate Truth through stories and anecdotes. The literal-minded overlook this fact and miss the real meaning of myths. In the Bible one reads that Jesus fed the multitude with five loaves and two fish. Some wonder how that was possible. Others speculate that perhaps those who came to see Jesus on that day brought their own lunch! The follower of Vedanta sees the event in a different light: By coming near Jesus, all forgot about food and drink and were fully satisfied with whatever little food they received from Jesus. The essential message here is the infinite dimension of Jesus' personality, not the details of the number of loaves and fish.

The fourth part consists of rituals. Rituals are symbolic observances to invoke concentration of mind. The offerings of fruits, flowers, candle, and incense, the practising of certain postures, and so forth, are external expressions of the internal worship. Unthinking observance of rituals has no meaning unless the seeker is able to grasp their real purpose.

Philosophy, mythology, and rituals serve only as husks that protect and preserve the kernel of spiritual truth. None of them can silence doubt and give certainty of faith, which calls for direct perception.

The Essential Nature of Direct Perception

Direct perception is more than blind belief, intellectual understanding, or emotional thrill. Blind belief lacks the support of either reason or experience, and so cannot silence doubt. Intellectual understanding based solely on reason cannot withstand the stresses of circumstances that are always unpredictable. Emotion by itself supplies the seeker with feeling or passion but can make him wander into dark alleys or up dead ends. To protect the seeker from possible self-deception, Vedanta lays down three criteria of Truth: testimony of scriptures, which serves as a working hypothesis; positive reasoning that seeks to separate the essential from the non-essential; and direct perception, which provides certainty of faith. When all three point to the same conclusion, the seeker may be assured that he has realized the whole Truth. In order to free the mind from the pitfalls of rationalization and emotionalism, rigorous mental disciplines are prescribed so that the seeker may be well grounded in detachment, not only from the external world but also from his blind loyalty to concepts and ideas.

The Essential Tests of Direct Perception

Vedanta gives three tests of direct perception. First, it is never negated or superseded by any subsequent experience. Second, it does not contradict reason. The ultimate Truth is never irrational. And third, it is always conducive to the welfare of all beings. Direct perception transforms the seeker forever. His moments of mystical intuition, or his ecstasies and trances, dreams and visions, cannot be taken as meaningful until they transform his personality forever.

A person of such transforming direct perception is called a free soul. He is free, not from anything but in the midst of everything, spontaneous but not given to license. He never takes a false step or sets a bad example

2. 'Darwin and Religion' by John C. Greene in *Science Ponders Religion*, ed. Harlow Shapely (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1960), p. 273.

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to others. He looks on the pleasure and pain of all beings as he looks on them in himself. The virtues of discrimination, dispassion, self-control, and compassion, which he had practised before for purification, now become natural to his personality. Like a person who enjoys watching a magical show but does not consider it to be real, a person of direct perception of the Ultimate Reality enjoys the diversities of the universe, knowing them to be not truly real.

Direct perception of the Real is the ultimate fruit of spiritual quest. But the hope for the fruit calls for developing a root. Spiritual quest is like growing a tree. The soil must be made ready. The seed must be collected and planted. When the seed sprouts into a plant, it has to be hedged around and nurtured. In due time the plant develops into a healthy tree, bringing first fragrant flowers and then the fruit. The soil is the mind. The seed is the Ideal. Hedging around consists of orthodox observances and one-pointed loyalty. Nurturing is the practice of devotion and concentration. Healthy growth is increasing steadiness in faith. The flowers are purity, self-control, discrimination, and dispassion, and the fruit is Self-Knowledge. The essential message is that those who hope for the fruit must first develop the root. Concentration and meditation are not possible without devotion, and devotion does not grow unless the seeker has one-pointed loyalty to one Ideal, one teacher, and one teaching. Those who take a universal approach from the beginning never develop a root, never grow, and never get the fruit.

The Essential of Scriptures

Scriptures are various. Philosophers and theologians are not unanimous in their views. Spiritual truth remains hidden in the cave of the heart. Religious traditions claim that the scriptures contain the revealed words of God. The words of the scriptures are infallible and are to be believed without question. History, however, tells us that all scriptures were written by human hands, and reflect the thoughts and perceptions of their human authors. Furthermore, many scriptures are not as ancient as they are thought to be, and many are of doubtful authenticity. While religious traditions ask for unquestioning loyalty to the words of the scriptures, science and reason insist on facts that are verifiable. Vedanta maintains that the essential message of the scriptures is to be grasped by separating the facts from the embellishments, and the facts are to be verified by the scrutiny of reason and personal experience. According to Vedanta scriptures are like roadmaps or cookbooks, which are useful for those who want to drive on the highway or cook in the kitchen. They are unnecessary for those who are adept in driving or cooking, and useless for those who are not interested in either.

The study of scriptures is no substitute for direct perception of Truth. Sankaracharya in his *Vivekachudamani* says:

> The study of the scriptures is useless so long as the highest Truth is unknown, and it is equally useless when the highest Truth has already been known. The scriptures consisting of many words are a dense forest which merely causes the mind to ramble. Hence men of wisdom should earnestly set about knowing the true nature of the Self. For one who has been bitten by the serpent of ignorance, the only remedy is the knowledge of Brahman. Of what avail are the Vedas and (other) scriptures, *mantras* (sacred formulae) and medicines to such a one? A disease does not leave off if one simply utters the name of the medicine, without taking it; (similarly) without direct realization one cannot be liberated by the mere utterance of the word Brahman.[3]

Following are the words of Sri Ramakrishna regarding the essential message of the scriptures:

3. *Vivekachudamani of Sri Sankaracharya*, verses 59–62, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970), pp. 21–2.

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One should learn the essence of the scriptures from the guru and then practise sādhanā. If one rightly follows spiritual discipline, then one directly sees God. The discipline is said to be rightly followed only when one plunges in. What will a man gain by merely reasoning about the words of the scriptures? Ah, the fools! They reason themselves to death over information about the path. They never take the plunge. What a pity!...I vowed to the Divine Mother that I would kill myself if I did not see God. I said to Her: 'O Mother, I am a fool. Please teach me what is contained in the Vedas, the Purānas, the Tantras, and the other scriptures.' The Mother said to me, 'The essence of the Vedanta is that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory.' The essence of the *Gītā* is what you get by repeating the word ten times. It is reversed into '*tāgi*', which refers to renunciation.[4]

The seer of Vedanta says:

I shall tell you in half a couplet that which has been stated in millions of Vedanta books: Brahman alone is real, and the world illusory; man is none other than Brahman.[5]

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,' says the Bible (*Matthew:* 5.8). Commenting on these words of Jesus, Swami Vivekananda says:

This sentence alone would save mankind if all books and prophets were lost. This purity of heart will bring the vision of God.[6]

The essential message of the Upanishads is 'Know Thyself'. According to one interpretation, the story of the *Bhagavad Gītā* is symbolic:

Arjuna represents the individual soul, and Sri Krishna the Supreme Soul dwelling in every heart. Arjuna's chariot is the body. The blind King Dhritarashtra is the mind under the spell of ignorance, and his hundred sons are man's numerous evil tendencies. The battle, a perennial one, is between the power of good and the power of evil. The warrior who listens to the advice of the Lord speaking from within will triumph in this battle and attain the Highest Good.[7]

Vedanta exhorts spiritual seekers to gather the essential spiritual message from the scriptures, then act according to it. A parable of Sri Ramakrishna makes this point clear:

One should learn the contents of the scriptures and then act according to their injunctions. A man lost a letter. He couldn't remember where he had left it. He began to search for it with a lamp. After two or three people had searched, the letter was at last found. The message in the letter was: 'Please send us five seers of sandesh and a piece of wearing-cloth.' The man read it and then threw the letter away. There was no further need of it; now all he had to do was to buy the five seers of sandesh and the piece of cloth.[8]

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* the story of the pundit (philosopher) who could not swim describes the importance of direct perception:

Once several men were crossing the Ganges in a boat. One of them, a pundit, was making a great display of his erudition, saying that he had studied various

4. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* abridged edition, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1988), pp. 332 and 333. Or, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1992), pp. 543–4. [Hereafter, *The Gospel.*]
5. *Self-Knowledge,* trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1989), p. 168.
6. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works,* p. 572. *Complete Works,* vol. 7, p. 103.
7. *The Bhagavad Gita,* trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1992), p. 2.
8. *The Gospel,* pp. 475–6.

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books — the Vedas, the Vedanta, and the six systems of philosophy. He asked a fellow passenger, 'Do you know the Vedanta?' 'No, revered sir.' 'The Sāṁkhya and the Pātañjala?' 'No, revered sir.' 'Have you read no philosophy whatsoever?' 'No, revered sir.' The pundit was talking in this vain way and the passenger sitting in silence, when a great storm arose and the boat was about to sink. The passenger said to the pundit, 'Sir, can you swim?' 'No,' replied the pundit. The passenger said, 'I don't know the Sāṁkhya or the Pātañjala, but I caṇ swim.' What will a man gain by knowing many scriptures? The one thing needful is to know how to cross the river of the world. God alone is real, and all else is illusory.[9]

The Essential Worship

According to Vedanta, worship has various forms. The lowest form is worshipping the Divine in an image or a symbol; higher than this is *japa* or repetition of a sacred word; higher still is meditation on the chosen form of the Divine; and the highest form of worship is communion with the Atman — maintaining a steady awareness of the fact that all we perceive is verily Brahman. Emphasizing the essential worship, the *Mahānirvāṇatantra* says:

> In the lotus of my heart do I contemplate the divine Intelligence, the Brahman without distinction and difference, who is the object of realization to even the creator, protector and destroyer of the universe; whom the Yogis attain through meditation; who destroys the fear of birth and death; and who is existence, intelligence, and the seed of all the worlds.[10]

Communion with Brahman is the most efficacious form of worship:

> By virtue of even a moment's serenity, attained through the knowledge of the identity of Atman and Brahman, the seeker attains the merit that one may obtain by bathing in the waters of all the holy rivers, by giving away the entire world in an act of charity, by performing a thousand sacrifices, by worshipping the three hundred and thirty millions of gods, and by rescuing, through after-death rites, one's ancestors from the suffering of the nether world.
>
> By the very birth of a man whose mind is absorbed in the Supreme Brahman — the immeasurable Ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute — his family becomes sinless, his mother blessed, and the earth sacred.[11]

In this worship, the body is thought of as the abode of Brahman; the lotus of the heart is the seat where Brahman dwells as Atman. Concentration of mind serves as the only light by which the presence of Atman is perceived. Prayer for illumination is the highest prayer. Self-mastery is the real austerity; giving up all desires is the highest renunciation; the virtues of discrimination, dispassion, purity, and kindness represent the fragrant flowers. Real solitude is dwelling in Brahman, That alone exists. The true practice of *prāṇāyāma*, control of breath, is regarding all mental states as Brahman alone. The correct posture is that in which the meditation on Brahman flows spontaneously. Realizing Brahman in all objects is true withdrawal of the mind. True concentration is that steadiness in which the mind perceives everything as Brahman. Merging the mind completely in Brahman is the state of true illumination.

Communion with Brahman as our true Self is the highest yoga. In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

> The fire of Yoga burns the cage of sin that is around a man. Knowledge becomes purified and Nirvāṇa is directly obtained. From Yoga comes knowledge; knowledge again helps the Yogi. He who combines in

9. *The Gospel*, p. 392.

10. *Universal Prayers*, (*Mahānirvāṇatantra*, III, 50), Swami Yatiswarananda, (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1977), p. 147.

11. *Self-Knowledge*, p. 172.

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himself both Yoga and knowledge, with him the Lord is pleased. Those that practise Mahāyoga, either once a day, or twice a day, or thrice, or always, know them to be gods. Yoga is divided into two parts. One is called Abhāva, and the other, Mahāyoga. Where one's self is meditated upon as zero, and bereft of quality, that is called Abhāva. That in which one sees the self as full of bliss and bereft of all impurities, and one with God, is called Mahāyoga. The Yogi, by each one, realizes his Self. The other Yogas that we read and hear of, do not deserve to be ranked with the excellent Mahāyoga in which the Yogi finds himself and the whole universe as God. This is the highest of all Yogas.[12]

Those who forget the essential fact of the mystical nature of worship miss the goal.

The Essential of Pilgrimage

A spiritual seeker makes pilgrimage to holy places and takes a dip in the holy waters of the rivers for self-purification. It is believed that the presiding spirit of God residing in those holy places and waters, out of compassion, removes the impurities of the visiting seeker. The holiness of a holy place, however, consists not of earth or stone, but of the deposits of holy thoughts and vibrations which the worshippers leave behind in that place. Vedanta, however, tells us that the essential place of pilgrimage is the sacred shrine of the heart. According to Sri Sankaracharya:

> He who, renouncing all activities, worships in the sacred and stainless shrine of Atman, which is independent of time, place, and distance; which is present everywhere; which is the destroyer of heat and cold, and the other opposites; and which is the giver of eternal happiness, becomes all-knowing and all-pervading and attains, hereafter, Immortality.[13]

The word *shrine* in the text also means a holy place (Tirtha). The allusion is to the pilgrimage of pious devotees to a holy place. There are certain disadvantages associated with holy places. As they may be situated at a great distance, pilgrimage may entail physical labour and suffering. The merit of a pilgrimage may be slight because of the inauspiciousness of the time. The comfort of the pilgrims may be disturbed by the weather. Robbers, thieves, or unscrupulous priests often give them trouble. Further, the merit accruing from a pilgrimage is not everlasting. But the worship in the sacred shrine of Atman is free from all these disadvantages and obstacles. Communion with Atman bestows upon the soul Immortality and Eternal Bliss.[14]

The *Mahābhārata* describes Atman as the true sacred river, bathing in which the soul becomes free from all impurities:

> The river of Atman is filled with the water of self-control; truth is its current, righteous conduct its banks, and compassion its waves. O son of Pāṇḍu, bathe in its sacred water; ordinary water does not purify the inmost soul.
>
> By worshipping a holy man who worships in the sacred shrine of Atman, the seeker obtains the results of pilgrimage: 'A visit to holy men bestows merit, because they may be regarded as moving holy places. The Lord, dwelling in their hearts, renders holy the place where they live.'[15]

Describing the true significance of pilgrimage, Swami Vivekananda says:

> When the whole world is the Form Universal of the Eternal Atman, the Ishvara (God), what is there to wonder at in special influences attaching to particular places? There are places where He manifests Himself specially, either spontaneously or through the earnest longing of pure souls, and the ordinary man, if he visits those

12. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 618. *Complete Works*, vol. 1, p. 189.
13. *Self-Knowledge*, verse 68, p. 171.
14. *Self-Knowledge*, pp. 171–2.
15. *Self-Knowledge*, p. 172.

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places with eagerness, attains his end quite easily. Therefore it may lead to the development of the Self in time to have recourse to holy places. But know it for certain that there is no greater Tirtha (holy spot) than the body of man. Nowhere else is the Atman so manifest as here. That car of Jagannatha that you see is but a concrete symbol of this corporeal car. You have to behold the Atman in this car of the body. Haven't you read *'Ātmānaṁ rathinaṁ viddhi* — Know the Atman to be seated on the chariot' etc., *'Madhye vāmanamāsīnaṁ viśve devā upāsate* — All the gods worship the Vāmana (the Supreme Being in a diminutive form) seated in the interior of the body'? The sight of the Atman is the real vision of Jagannatha. And the statement *'Rathe tu vāmanaṁ dṛṣṭvā punarjanma na vidyate* — Seeing the Vamana on the car, one is no more subject to rebirth', means that if you can visualize the Atman which is within you, and disregarding which you are always identifying yourself with this curious mass of matter, this body of yours — if you can see that, then there is no more rebirth for you. If the sight of the Lord's image on a wooden framework confers liberation on people, then crores of them would be liberated every year — specially with such facility of communication by rail nowadays![16]

A Vedanta prayer underscores the true spirit of ceremonial worship and pilgrimage:

> O Lord, in my worship I have attributed forms to Thee, who art formless. O Thou teacher of the world, by my hymns I have, as it were, contradicted Thy indescribable nature. By going on pilgrimage I have, as it were, denied Thy Omnipresence. O Lord of the universe, pray, forgive me these three transgressions.[17]

The Essential of Liberation

What happens to a person after death? Materialists state that death is the end of the story of life and all descriptions of the hereafter are mere hearsay. The texts and traditions of different faiths speak of an eternal life of happiness in heaven for the virtuous and an eternal life of suffering in hell for the sinners. The doctrine of absolute annihilation is inconsistent with the moral order of the universe. The doctrine of eternal happiness in heaven or eternal suffering in hell does not make sense from the point of view of reason, because anything that has a beginning in time must have an end in time. Also such a doctrine reveals a total disproportion between cause and effect: eternal punishment of the soul for the mistakes of a few years of earthly life goes against all dictates of justice. Furthermore, it is argued that the existence of heaven and hell cannot be proved or demonstrated objectively. The dead do not come back to give us a report.

We live in an age of doubt and any descriptions of the hereafter must be verifiable in order to be believable. In the absence of any objective and scientific proof, such descriptions seem like the wishful thinking of a few visionaries. Science has proved that humans are not the chosen people or chosen species, but only one of the millions of biological systems. Scientific discoveries have made man responsible to himself and for himself.

Vedanta takes a realistic view of the quest for liberation and says the following:

(1) Liberation is freedom of the soul from the bondage of its body and mind.

(2) Such liberation is spiritual, not physical, and it is possible only through Self-Knowledge, by which the soul realizes its true nature as immortal and incorporeal.

(3) Self-Knowledge is neither an attainment nor a new production, but a revelation which is dependent on self-purification.

16. *Talks with Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1939), pp. 107–8. *Complete Works*, vol. 7, pp. 119–20.

17. *Hinduism: Its Meaning for the Liberation of the Spirit*, Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1992), p. 174.

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(4) Liberation is always personal and individual, because individually we are born, we suffer, and we die.

(5) Liberation is the inescapable destiny of all souls and not, as some maintain, the prerogative of the elect, select, or chosen few.

(6) Liberation is not merely absence of pain and suffering, but a state of positive bliss.

(7) Liberation, in order to be believable, must be achieved while living and not after death. One who dies in bondage will remain bound after death.

(8) Heaven and hell are mere experiences of the mind. The state that exists between death and the next birth is that of dream.

Giving the essential of liberation, Sankaracharya says:

> Neither by Yoga, nor by Sāṁkhya, nor by work, nor by learning, but by the realization of one's identity with Brahman is liberation possible, and by no other means.[18]

The Essential of Bondage

Truth is self-revealing and God is self-evident. Yet we are not able to see the truth and see God, because obstacles stand in the way. Some see the obstacles as the acts of such beings as Satan, the devil, Mara and Iblis, who are at constant war with God's will. To accept the existence of such beings, is to believe that there is a place where God is not, and that God's omnipresence and omnipotence are mere myths. Vedanta identifies the real culprit as the ego, born of ignorance, living on illusion, and creating countless conceits of the body and mind. The essential conceit is what Sri Ramakrishna aptly points out, *Kāminī-kāñcana*, lust and greed. All desires, attachments, delusions, and fantasies, are but the offshoots of these two. Wearing innumerable forms and disguises, lust and greed deceive the seeker in the spiritual path. Unable to perceive what is true, the seeker is forced to live in a world of false values and virtues. By striking root in our body and mind, lust and greed become malignant and destructive.

The obstacles that stand in the way are our own creations. They are the accumulated results of our past indulgent living, and are to be overcome by our own effort. Swami Vivekananda points out the essential of bondage and says:

> [Vedanta says that] the cause of all that is apparently evil is the limitation of the Unlimited. The love which gets limited into little channels and seems to be evil eventually comes out at the other end and manifests itself as God. Vedanta also says that the cause of all this apparent evil is in ourselves. Do not blame any supernatural being; neither be hopeless and despondent, nor think we are in a place from which we can never escape unless someone comes and lends us a helping hand. That cannot be, says Vedanta. We are like silkworms. We make the thread out of our own substance, and spin the cocoon, and in the course of time are imprisoned inside. But this cannot be for ever. We shall develop spiritual realization in that cocoon, and, like the butterfly, come out free. We have woven this network of karma around ourselves, and in our ignorance we feel as if we are bound, and weep and wail for help. But help does not come from without; it comes from within ourselves. Cry to all the gods in the universe. I cried for years, and in the end I received help. But help came from within myself; and I had to undo what I had done by mistake. That is the only way.[19]

The Essential of the Way

The way to the goal is self-purification, and the essential of self-purification is the purifcation of the mind through the practice of self-control. The truth of the ever-shining Divine Self is revealed in the mirror of the purified mind. All spiritual practices and aus-

18. *Vivekachudamani of Sri Sankaracharya*, verse 56, p. 20.

19. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, p. 375. *Complete Works*, vol. 2, pp. 355–6.

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terities culminate in the control of the mind. Sri Krishna in the *Uddhava Gita* (XVIII.46) says:

> Charity, the performance of one's duty, the observance of vows, general and particular, the hearing of the scriptures, meritorious acts, and all other works — all these culminate in the control of the mind. The control of the mind is the highest Yoga.[20]

The various spiritual practices and austerities do not give us anything new; they only take away the obstacles that are standing in the way.

Practice of purification has three parts: physical, verbal, and mental. Since the impurities are well-entrenched in these three levels, they cannot be rooted out unless practice includes all these three parts. Further, such practice becomes effective only when it is continuous, conscious, and temperate. Practice, unless it is continuous, loses its transforming effect. It is required to be conscious because by controlling the conscious level of the mind, the subconscious level is brought under control. Practice is required to be temperate because human nature cannot be hurried. Habits cannot be altered overnight. A hardline practice can provoke reactions of the mind, while a lukewarm and intermittent practice can make the seeds of impurities resistant to change. The essential fact is that the mind never becomes controlled unless controlled, never becomes purified unless purified. Control of the mind is never possible without the control of the senses, and the essential of self-control is the control over lust and greed. When these two are controlled, the mind is automatically controlled. Without self-control, the practice of meditation, prayer, and repetition of a holy name becomes fruitless. So Sankaracharya says:

> He who is free from the terrible snare of the hankering after sense-objects, so very difficult to get rid of, is alone fit for liberation, and none else — even though he be versed in all the six *Shastras* [six systems of orthodox Hindu philosophy]. The shark of hankering catches by the throat those seekers after liberation who have got only an apparent dispassion [*Vairāgya*] and are trying to cross the ocean of *Saṁsāra* [relative existence], and violently snatching them away, drowns them halfway....Whoever seeks to realize the Self by devoting himself to the nourishment of the body, proceeds to cross a river by catching hold of a crocodile, mistaking it for a log.[21]

Vedanta asserts that one who wants gold must dig for it. Affirming this view, Sankaracharya says:

> As a treasure hidden underground requires (for its excavation) competent instruction, excavation, the removal of stones and other such things lying above it, and (finally) grasping, but never comes out by being (merely) called out by name, so the transparent Truth of the Self, which is hidden by *Māyā* and its effects, is to be attained through the instructions of a knower of Brahman, followed by reflection, meditation and so forth, but not through perverted arguments.[22]

Control of the mind has positive and negative aspects. The positive aspect is observance of purity by dwelling on the Divine; the negative aspect is restraint from sense-gratification. The restraint aspect teaches the seeker to withstand the impacts of the surging waves of lust and greed, while the observance aspect teaches him to persist in dwelling on the Divine. Mere restraint without observance is never possible, while mere observance without restraint will have no transforming effect.

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20. *Uddhava Gita*, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1971), p. 282.

21. *Vivekachudamani of Sri Sankaracharya*, verses 78, 79 and 84, pp. 29 and 31.

22. *Vivekachudamani of Sri Sankaracharya*, verse 65, p. 23.

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The Essential Message

The essential message is that a human individual is basically divine. His true self, the focus of the infinite, all-pervading Self of the universe, is his real identity. The manifestation of this identity is the goal of all spiritual quest. All living creatures, consciously or unconsciously, are proceeding toward this goal. When the journey is unconscious, driven by the force of circumstances, we call it evolution of nature. When the journey is conscious, we call it spiritual quest. The divine Self, when neglected or forgotten, confronts us at every step of our life in the form of the inexorable laws of pain and pleasure, birth and death. Denial of the divine Self is the surest way to doom. When acknowledged and worshipped with eyes open as well as with eyes closed, the Self endows us with everlasting life, eternal fulfilment, and endless bliss. Outlining this essential message, Swami Vivekananda says:

> Perception is our only real knowledge or religion. Talking about our soul for ages will never make us know it. There is no difference between theories and atheism. In fact, the atheist is the truer man. Every step I take in the light is mine for ever. When you go to a country and see it, then it is yours. We have each to see for ourselves; teachers can only 'bring the food', we must eat it to be nourished. Argument can never prove God save as a logical conclusion.
>
> It is impossible to find God outside of ourselves. Our own souls contribute all the divinity that is outside of us. We are the greatest temple. The objectification is only a faint imitation of what we see within ourselves.
>
> Concentration of the powers of the mind is our only instrument to help us see God. If you know one soul — your own—, you know all souls, past, present, and to come. The will concentrates the mind; certain things excite and control this will, such as reason, love, devotion, and breathing. The concentrated mind is a lamp that shows us every corner of the soul.[23]

Vedanta says that the root cause of all human problems is spiritual and offers spiritual solutions. It seeks to discover the spiritual truth often lost in the wilderness of superstitions, dogmas, and myths. It maintains that there will be nothing new if all the people of the world convert to Hinduism, or Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or any other religion. But certainly the world will be a different place if some rise above the walls of the non-essentials of religion and realize the essential truth. If Vedanta disturbs some, it is because its viewpoints challenge their prejudices and illusions. Knowledge of the essentials of Vedanta may be chimerical to those who are deluded by the trinkets and glitter of the world, but it is of utmost importance to the spiritual seekers who strive for the real truth. ❐

23. *Vivekananda: The Yogas and Other Works*, pp. 545–6. *Complete Works*, vol. 7, pp. 59–60.

> The real Guru is one through whom we have our spiritual descent. He is the channel through which the spiritual current flows to us, the link which joins us to the spiritual world. Too much faith in personality has a tendency to produce weakness and idolatry, but intense love for the Guru makes repid progress possible, he connects us with the internal Guru. Adore your Guru if there be real truth in him; that Guru-bhakti (devotion to the teacher) will quickly lead you to the highest.
>
> —*Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 100

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Advaita and the Problem of Religious Language

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Much of the religious language as employed in the scriptures is vague and poetic, metaphorical and even paradoxical. This language seems to be a special one of its kind having its own rules of interpretation. If one accepted the Wittgensteinian idea that a language is a game played by rules particular to it, theology too can have its own language.

But this position offers difficulties and must have to be closely looked into. Even theological language uses ordinary words in common usage in an uncommon way. (For example — 'One who claims to have known the truth does not know it, precisely because he claims to have known it' — *Kenopanishad.* The word 'know' has obviously an unusual meaning here.

This extension of ordinary language must have its justification. Otherwise, the objects of such religious assertion become difficult to define, and the assertions themselves are literally meaningless being in the nature of the case unverifiable in terms of sense-experience and common language. Even if the theological assertions speak about experiences that are not derived through the senses and their language becomes consequently a set of metaphors and symbols, these metaphors and symbols should be translatable into non-metaphorical, and hence common meanings of words. This is the theory of secondary implication or *lakṣaṇa* adopted when there is unintelligibility of literal meaning. (For example, 'the village is on the Ganges' where the word 'Ganges' is to be taken to mean 'the banks of the Ganges'.)

The double-language theory, in fact, holds that transempirical facts could be expressed by metaphors alone for a more adequate communication. Even then, the metaphors must have their roots in some common experience, however that may be from the metaphor.

This is true even in the case of symbols. One should know what the symbols stand for. There should be a non-symbolic access to that which is symbolized. But this raises a difficulty in communication because only when the symbolized object is somehow known symbols are useful and impart knowledge. This is particularly so when symbols are the only means of communication. If this were the case, the symbols become rather redundant.

There is yet another way of stating the problem. It is said sometimes that the meaning of the word lies in its use. Hence, religious assertions may be taken to 'specify the form of behaviour which is in accordance with what one takes to be fundamental principles of the religion in question'.

In yet another way, religious assertions are said to be ideological assertions. They have the form of empirical hypotheses but in reality function as value-judgements.

They increase the 'psychological effectiveness of a certain value-judgement for some people by making them seem to be crucial but mysterious laws of nature'. In other words, they help an individual to persevere in the way of life one has decided upon on grounds other than reason. Within that system by a non-cognitive emotive preferment, the religious belief makes the believer live with some moral ideals to which he is committed by choice. The behaviour and conduct of people who swear by religious assertions become supremely important. The dif-

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ference that a knowledge of theology makes in one's behaviour is a crucial test of that knowledge.

In the Advaita Vedanta, the above questions assume great relevance and that system has some answers and solutions to the problem raised. That system insists on self-inquiry and the royal road to release is self-knowledge. Theology is only a set of rules for self-mastery and self-inquiry and as such it is useful and true. It looks like a set of symbols but really is empirical. In other words, it has to do with men and matters here and now rather than with the beyond and the non-empirical transcendence.

Reality in Advaita is the self of all, their true being. It is not an existent among existents in space and time. If existence is to be a space-time framework, then God or Brahman does not exist. Nor can existence be a predicate of God or Brahman like any other predicate of a substance, as for instance, 'the lotus being white'.

So, Advaita casts Hindu theology into a radical form. It has an immediate reference in the fact of one's own self. Everything else is external, nay, even accidental to this deep being. Compared to this depth of one's own self, everything else lacks immediacy, is less empirical and therefore hazy in its facticity. Self (Atman) is the most factual. It is what is signified by the theological statements of identity like 'That Thou Art' *(tat-tvam-asi)*. When this identity is not stated, such statements are symbolic remote from the most empirical facticity of the self.

This above position involves a radical transvaluation of scriptural language. Sankara thought that he could discover two levels of language in it. One is the literal expression naming the stark fact of the self. ('All this is Brahman'; 'I am Brahman'.) The other about the not-self comprising the material world is indirect and symbolic.

Advaita takes personal God to be the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. But this god-hood involves its being a category among categories, the prime-mover, the first-cause and is caught in the causal scheme of relations. This is the God of traditional theology. Advaita treats God of this type as less real and less empirical because he is removed from the factual immediacy of the self. The other-ness makes God distant and transcendent to experience. To make statements about such a God is therefore riddled with contradictions. Hence the need for metaphors and other symbols which are inadequate for religious communication. The so-called proofs for the existence of God fail because they do not treat God as one's own self and give the immediate experience of reality. The self is presupposed in all proofs and is ahead of them all. If anything, the proofs testify the fact and *a priori* fail.

Though the religious language of God is not wholly true, it is not totally false either. It is the use of a literalist theology for a higher radical construction. It has its uses in that it opens a way for further inquiry, moral behaviour and love. Belief in a personal God in the traditional theology is useful in that it unifies man's personality and integrates his values. This takes him to his own being in course of time as a matter of personal experience. The erstwhile God is not in spiritual experience one's own self. Consequently the conundrums of a religious statement in the traditional theology vanish, because nothing could be more immediately present than one's own being or the self. Nor can this self be said to be known as an object because it, as the pure subject, makes everything else known. When in traditional theologies God is said to be known and ways of knowing him are demanded and laid down, it is wrongly supposed that God is *an object* of knowing like any other object, yet continuing to be transcendent. It is not understood that God is not an object among objects nor is it therefore an other, a total beyond. The Advaita position that God or reality is the self of all beings makes the problem of religious communication and language easier to settle. ❐

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The Two-fold Ideal

SWAMI SHIVAMAYANANDA

Revered Maharaj, a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and an Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, highlights in this thought-provoking article the logic behind the stand of the Ramakrishna Mission's two-fold ideal: One's own liberation and the good of the world. In doing so, he makes a comparison with the old monastic ideal and justifies the Ramakrishna Mission's stand in an admirable way.

'If you once accept the reality of the world, then the world will never cease!' This was the objection raised by a staunch Advaitin of Uttarkashi to the path of service followed by the monks of the Ramakrishna Order.

Monks of the Ramakrishna Mission serve people in distress. Obviously this implies that they accept the reality of the body and mind of the distressed person and the sorrow originating from them. Thus the reality of the world is accepted. The essence of Advaita is: 'Brahman alone is real and the world is unreal.' Therefore, by serving people in distress the monks of Ramakrishna Order accept the reality of the world, and thereby act against the tenets of Advaitism — this is the objection.

The objection, however, can be countered with another question: 'Why do you take care of your own body, such as eating and bathing? By doing that you are also accepting the reality of the world. Like the bodies and minds of others, your body and mind also are a part of the world and are therefore unreal!'

This may silence our detractors but will not justify our stand. We can justify our stand thus: It is true that the body and mind of the distressed person as also your body and mind do not have absolute reality, but they have phenomenal (*vyāvahārika*) reality. That means only with the knowledge of Brahman they (body and mind) will cease to be real. That is to say, Brahman will manifest itself in their place. When one thing appears as something else, the appearing thing is regarded as unreal or *mithyā*. That which in reality is Brahman is appearing as body and mind. So, from the absolute standpoint the body and mind are unreal (*mithyā*).

In insufficient light, a piece of rope appeared as a snake. By bringing light and when seen carefully, no snake was found. It was seen that a piece of rope was lying instead. This appearance of snake on a rope is an illustration of unreality (*mithyā*). But the substratum of the illusory snake, viz. the rope, is real. What is perceived as body and mind owing to ignorance will vanish with the dawn of knowledge and then their substratum, Brahman, will become manifest. That is why to the statement, 'Brahman alone is real and the world unreal', the Advaitin also adds: '*Jīva* (soul) is verily Brahman.'

So, while the Advaitin of the Uttarakhand (a region of the Himalayas from Haridwar, Rishikesh and upward) by taking minimum care for maintaining the body and by continuously discriminating about the real nature of the Self proceeds towards the goal, the Ramakrishnite also proceeds towards the same goal with his efforts for the liberation of the Self and for the good of the world. In the latter part, while taking care of his own body, he serves others seeing them as veritable manifestations of Brahman.

The old order is now almost totally changed. By blessing of science and technology, various modes of speedy travel have

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been discovered, and the network of roads spread like the nervous system throughout the hills. As a result, even secluded centres for austerities inhabited only by monks are now teeming with pilgrims and tourists — Indian and foreign. They approach the *Sadhus* in their *Kutias* with various questions. These include even such questions as: You have received much from society, what are you giving in return?' Naturally, the monks can no longer remain totally unconcerned about the society.

Let us now enumerate the advantages and disadvantages of the two paths: the path of the traditional Vedantin and the path of the Ramakrishna Mission monk.

The thought vibrations of *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda* emanating from the traditional Vedantin tend to induce similar vibrations in others' minds which prompt them to think noble thoughts and do noble deeds.

This path is undoubtedly very difficult because the aspirant has to keep himself constantly engaged in the practice of Vedanta, viz. hearing (*Śravaṇa*), reflection (*Manana*) and meditation (*Nididhyāsana*) or discrimination (*Vicāra*) until he falls asleep or until he is dead. In this he should not be having any interruption by desires etc. even in a small degree. As a well-known Vedantic maxim puts it:

Āsupteḥ āmṛteḥ kālaṁ
nayed vedānta cintayā;
Kvacinnāvasaraṁ dattvā
kāmādīnāṁ manāgapi.

Naturally, the number of aspirants who can successfully do this is extremely small, although many people without understanding their incompetence rush headlong into this path. And that is why many monks in Uttarakhand are seen idling away their time in fruitless pursuits. Those who cannot keep themselves engaged even in scriptural studies totally waste their time doing good neither to themselves nor to others. This section of monks, depending for their sustenance on others without making any contribution whatsoever to the good of the society, get demoralized and vitiate the atmosphere around them.

The path of the Vedantin of the Ramakrishna school is slightly easier, as has been explained by Swami Premeshanandaji in the book, *Ek Sonar Manush*, by Swami Abjajananda (p. 516):

> Sri Rajendra Nath Ghosh, a celebrated Advaitic scholar of Bengal, did not have a high opinion about the monks of the Ramakrishna Order because he thought that without keeping themselves engaged in the study of the Vedanta they wasted their time in social service. Once Premeshanandaji, vindicating the stand of the Ramakrishna school, said to him, 'There is extreme dearth of spiritual study and practices in the society nowadays. Especially, the good people are usually of weak health. I think, because of this, Swamiji, understanding our poor competence for Vedanta, has prescribed this new method.' Continuing, he said, 'We shall remain engaged in the practice of *Śravaṇa* (hearing), *Manana* (reflection) and *Nididhyāsana* (meditation) as long as we can, according to the capability of our body and mind, and during rest of the time, we shall dedicate ourselves to the service of all thinking that the Paramatman dwells in the heart of every being. For, serving the *Jīva* with the awareness of *Tattvamasi* (Thou art That) is as much *Nididhyāsana* as meditating on *So'ham* (I am That) is.'
>
> No sooner had Mr. Ghosh heard these words, than he stood up in joy and with his hands raised said, 'Bah! Bah! (Excellent! excellent!)' (p. 516). Continuing he said, 'Oh, I am now saved. Maharaj, you have saved me today! These few words of yours have resolved my doubts.' (p. 189) *(Translation author's.)*

And yet this path also is not as easy as it may appear to those who have not attempted it. To keep up the spirit of service of *Śiva* in *Jīva* along with careful execution of a task for

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its successful completion is really difficult.

The path of the Vedantin of the Ramakrishna Order is in agreement with the modern outlook that one must contribute one's share to collective human welfare. Moreover, by serving others we derive a form of higher pleasure which really comes from experiencing, maybe unconsciously, our real Self in them. According to Swami Vivekananda, 'There are moments when every man feels that he is one with the universe, and he rushes forth to express it, whether he knows it or not. This expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality. This is summed up in the Vedanta philosophy by the celebrated aphorism, *Tat Tvam Asi*.'[1]

Thus by involving the monks in Seva (service) which is consistent with the path of their Advaitic practice, Swami Vivekananda has added a new dimension to the ancient monastic ideal.

However, it is also true that if the aspirant is not very careful about maintaining the right spiritual attitude, much harm may result for more than one reason. Success in work often brings name and fame, and repetition of this may give one power and position. These are likely to inflate one's ego and sweep one off one's feet. Moreover, a successful worker is likely to get unduly attached to the life of work if he is not very cautious. If detachment is not carefully developed at the same time, the person concerned is destined to suffer when forced to give up work due to disease, old age, or some other cause.

So then, just as the path of the traditional Vedantin has its drawbacks, the path of the Vedantin seeking the welfare of others though benefiting the modern trend has its difficulties too.

Swamiji's greatness lay in blending the two ideals, liberation of one's own Self and welfare of the world, into a single ideal for the Ramakrishna Order. By placing equal emphasis on both parts of the twin ideals, the obstacles to the one are removed to some extent with the help of the other.

***

Some more statements in support of the above are given below:

a) From highest Brahman to the
yonder worm,
And to the very minutest atom,
Everywhere is the same God,
the All-Love;
Friend, offer mind, soul, body,
at their feet.
These are His manifold forms
before thee,
Rejecting them, where seekest thou
for God?
Who loves all beings without distinction,
He indeed is worshipping best his God.[2]

b) Let me tell you again that you must be pure and help anyone who comes to you, as much as lies in your power. And this is good Karma. By the power of this, the heart becomes pure (*Chitta-shuddhi*), and then *Shiva* who is residing in every one will become manifest.[3]

c) 'Swamiji told me at Darjeeling: "Haribhai, I have made a new path, and opened it to all. Up till now it was thought that liberation could be attained by meditation, repetition of God's names, scriptural discussion and so forth. Now young men and women will attain liberation by doing the Lord's work." What Swamiji said is true. Never doubt it!' — said Swami Turiyananda.[4]

d) Swami Turiyananda would tell the monks of the Sevashrama in Varanasi: 'If even for three days you serve in the right spirit, that is to say as worship, you will

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 1, p. 389. [Hereafter, *CW*.]
2. *CW*, vol. 4, p. 497.
3. *CW*, vol. 3, p. 142.
4. Swami Ritajananda, *Swami Turiyananda* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1973), p. 180. [Hereafter, *Swami Turiyananda*.]

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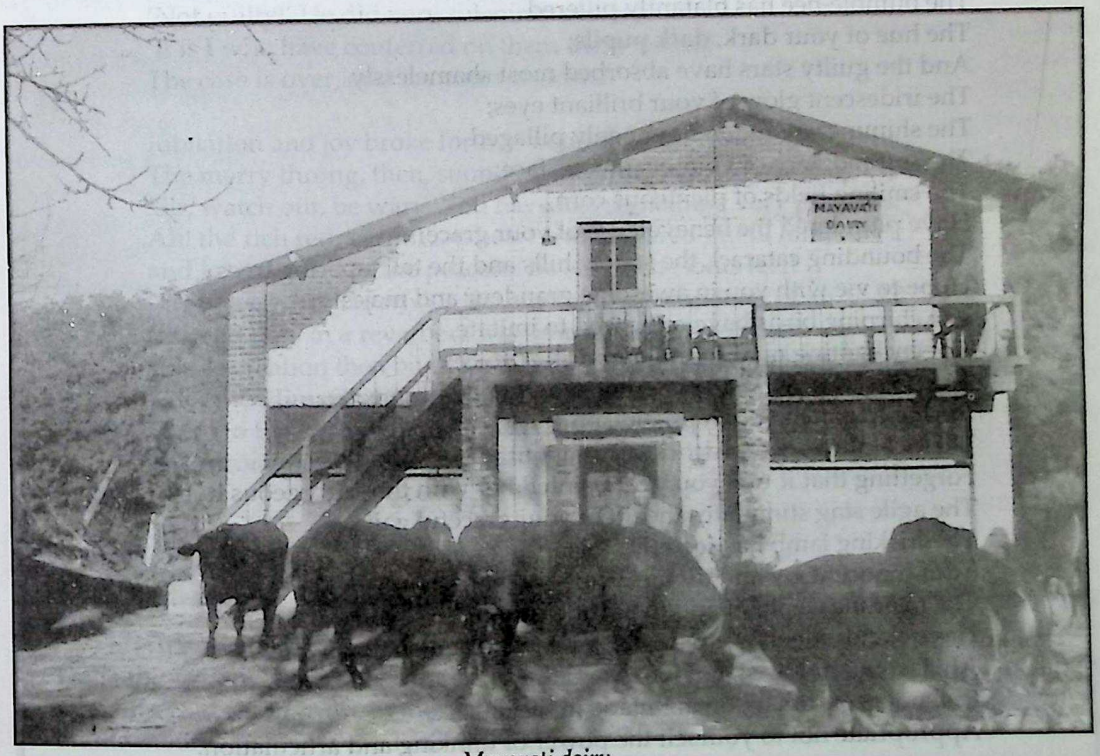
have the vision of the Lord. Those who work in this manner realize this truth in the depths of their being.'[5]

e) By means of the constant effort to do good to others we are trying to forget ourselves; this forgetfulness of self is the one great lesson we have to learn in life.[6]

f) 'Look Nischaya, by becoming a monk one should not be a burden on anyone. If you take someone's food you must repay it in some form or other. The community of monks, by eating the food of others (without giving any return), has become inert. All the time depending on others, they, instead of attaining elevation have undergone downfall. Never do that yourself. Even if you cannot do anything else, beg at least a pice, buy an earthen pitcher with it, and, sitting by the side of the street, give water to the thirsty pedestrians. Even slaking the thirst of the pedestrians will be a noble act. To remain inert eating others' food is extremely disgraceful.'[7] ❐

5. *Swami Turiyananda*, p. 164.
6. *CW*, vol. 1, p. 84.
7. Swami Vivekananda to Swami Nischayananda, quoted in Swami Abjajananda, *Swamiijir Padaprante* (Bengali), (Belur Math: Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, 1983), 3rd edition, p. 292; see also *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1983, p. 266, and *Vedanta Kesari*, 1985, p. 17 (at p. 20).



Mayavati dairy

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An Unusual Case: The Judge Convicted

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The irate Prosecutor thundered:
'What brazen, bold and blatant robbery is this, My Lord?
Let us summon them all to the dock;
And pray, you sit in judgement over them all.
From East to West in his leisurely ride,
The unabashed sun flaunts in your red, orange and golden robe;
The red, red roses and the orange blossoms
Have connived with him and looted the divine hue;
The fresh morning dew has stolen the coolness of your touch;
The variegated, smiling blossoms of pleasant dawn,
Have stealthily made sway with your prismatic splendour;
Phoebus' favourite, the lovely soft lotus,
Tries to capture the smooth delicacy of your tender feet;
The tender tendrils hope to replicate
The undulating waves of your lustrous hair;
The bumble-bee has blatantly pilfered
The hue of your dark, dark pupils;
And the guilty stars have absorbed most shamelessly
The iridescent glow of your brilliant eyes;
The shimmering moon has openly pillaged
The soft radiance of your beauteous face;
The smiling fields of plenteous corn,
Have plundered the benevolence of your grace;
The bounding cataract, the stately hills and the tall tapering trees
Hope to vie with you in awesome grandeur and majesty;
The chirping birds have conspired to imitate,
The enchanting nuances of your dulcet voice;
The pompous swan displays her snow-white plume,
Daring to match you in pristine purity;
The rich plumaged peacock struts about in her vain glory,
Forgetting that it was you, that painted her with those gorgeous hues;
The agile stag stimulates the lilt of your graceful gait;
The frisking lamb has secretly stolen,
Your innocent joy and divine glee;
The majestic elephant and the gentle cow,
Have clandestinely shared your power and selfless love;
Ah! last but not least, oh! foolish man,
Feel not proud that you are made in his image.
Appropriate not to yourself the power of thinking and articulation.

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Remember ye, one and all, you have transgressed the divine law,
Plundered presumptuously Divinity's treasure mine,
And so stand convicted for charges manifold.'
The charges against each one resounded in the august, hushed chamber,
As the prosecution began enumerating them in the Divine Presence.

One by one they were called to admit their guilt.
Dazed and downcast, they came in confusion and despair.
'Speak,' said the Prosecutor, 'own up your traitorous guilt.
No hope of remission have ye, the case is crystal clear.'

The humiliated crowd gazed at one another's face,
Bewildered, they murmured inarticulate words
That carried no meaning or any weight.
'Order! Order!' demanded the Divine Judge,
'Have ye any defence, then let him speak.'
The moments ticked interminably on, but none came forward to defend.

The Prosecutor was jubilant that indeed he had been so triumphant.
The awkward silence was soon scattered away,
When the Judge stood up to pronounce the verdict.
'Not guilty!' He did very solemnly declare,
'It is I who have conferred on them these graces!
The case is over, and the court is closed.'

Jubilation and joy broke forth in boundless profusion.
The merry throng, then, sounded a warning to the retreating Prosecutor:
'Sir, watch out, be wary. You have lost something very precious.'
Ah! the rich red, vermillion heart was conjured out of him,
and lo! it nestled in the peaceful haven of His lotus feet!
'Tis not we, but He who is the most daring plunderer of all.'
Chimed they in a reverberating tuneful choral melody.
Whole creation then burst forth into a hymn of adoration:
'Glory to Him, Glory to the God of gods,
Glory to the enchanting beloved Giridhari—
The incorrigible stealer of all hearts!' ❐

He is the sun dwelling in the bright heavens. He is the air dwelling in the mid-region. He is the fire dwelling on earth. He is the guest dwelling in the house. He dwells in men, in the gods, in truth, in the sky. He is born in the water, on earth, in the sacrifice, on the mountains. He is the True and the Great.

—*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, II.2.2

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Vedanta: Concepts and Application — Through Sri Ramakrishna's Life

SWAMI MUMUKSHANANDA

We give below the text of a paper presented by Swami Mumukshananda at the International Seminar on 'Vedanta: Concepts and Application' held on the occasion of the Centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission from 26 to 30 December 1997 at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta. In the seminar, twenty-three scholars from different countries of the East and West presented their papers which was followed by lively discussions among the participants-scholars. This paper has been since then softly edited by the writer who is also the Managing Editor of the Prabuddha Bharata. *The author is the President of Advaita Ashrama (Mayavati) with its Publication Department in Calcutta. He is also a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission. In this thought-provoking paper the Swami focusses attention on the fundamental concepts and applications of Vedanta as demonstrated in the life,* sādhanā *and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.*

It is well known that Vedanta presents the quintessence of the Vedas. It is a science of Reality behind the universe and humanity. The fundamental concepts of Vedanta — the concept of Atman (the Reality behind the individual personality), the concept of Brahman (God or the Absolute, the Reality behind the ever-changing universe), the concept of *mukti* (liberation), and the like — have come down in human society not merely as the subject-matter of theoretical speculations but as truths or principles that can be verified through supra-sensuous experience at the super-conscious level of mind called *samādhi* (absorption).

All ideal teachers of Vedanta might not have written books to strengthen its theoretical basis by their rational exposition, but they all had *anubhava* or *aparokṣānubhūti* (direct realization) of Reality — Atman and Brahman, in the inmost depths of their hearts, rendered perfectly pure and free of desires for enjoyment (*bhoga-vāsanā*) through moral and spiritual disciplines. That realization transformed their human personalities into divine personalities described by such words as *Ātmajña* (knower of Atman), *Brahmajñāni* (knower of Brahman), *Sthitaprajña* (one whose Wisdom is established), etc. They experienced that they were not matter or bodies or minds but that they were the birthless, deathless, pure, perfect, blissful Atman — the source of all divine qualities. From that realization they looked upon all others also as Atman with an attitude of love and same-sightedness, each person or object being in their eyes a manifestation of the Ultimate Reality called Satchidananda Brahman in Vedantic literature. Their minds were raised to a level where praise or blame, success or failure, pleasure or pain could not disturb their inner peace. From that level they could only love and serve others. They constantly engaged themselves in doing welfare to all beings (*sarva-bhūta-hite-ratāḥ*), like the gentle breeze of the spring (*vasantavat loka-hitaṁcarantaḥ*). This is how they *applied* the Vedantic concepts in their practical lives. They not merely talked on Vedanta but they also lived Vedanta. They were ideal exemplars of Vedanta.

Like Shukadeva, Ramanuja, Sri Krishna, Sri Chaitanya, Madhva and a host of others of the past, Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) verified the truths of Vedanta through his experi-

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ence of *samādhi* and lived a life of love, compassion and service to all. A study of his life reveals to us that he was an extraordinary, comprehensive exemplar of Vedantic truths and of their application in day-to-day life.[1] He spurned book learning; so there is no book by him. His life and activities demonstrate the validity and applicability of the basic concepts of Vedanta in our individual and collective lives. His utterances are recorded mainly in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by Mahendranath Gupta, but many are also scattered in the writings of some of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples. The philosophical implications of his sayings have been presented mainly by Swami Vivekananda and several other direct disciples like Swamis Turiyananda, Saradananda, and others. Quite a few modern reputed professors of philosophy also have written books on the philosophical implications of his utterances. Sri Ramakrishna never appears to be a philosopher in the commonly used sense of the term, but the basic thoughts of a philosophical system lie embedded in his sayings. As the Upaniṣads are the ground of the Vedantic philosophy, so Sri Ramakrishna's sayings about general spiritual matters and about his own spiritual experiences are the ground of a philosophical system of Vedanta — a system that can reconcile the three principal Vedantic philosophical systems.

II

What exactly is meant by describing Sri Ramakrishna as *a most* comprehensive (according to some, *the most* comprehensive) exemplar of Vedanta? To answer this, let us review the three main schools of Vedanta Philosophy: Dvaita (Dualism), Viśiṣṭādvaita (Qualified Non-Dualism or Quasi-Monism) and Advaita (Non-Dualism or Monism) represented respectively by Madhva (1179–1278), Rāmānuja (1017–1137) and Śaṅkara (788–820). These three great teachers and philosophers of Vedanta are each considered as the historic exemplar of only one system of Vedanta. Each of them not merely expounded his philosophical system but also had the supra-sensuous realization (*anubhūti*) of God (or Absolute) and Soul as explained in his philosophy. Thus, each of them was an exemplar of one system of Vedanta. Sri Ramakrishna's life shows that he was an exemplar of all the three systems of Vedanta. Swami Vivekananda aptly described him as one who was 'as ardent a dualist, as ardent an Advaitist, as ardent a Bhakta, as a Jnani'[2]. In fact, with a distinction of his own, he was a Dvaitist (Dualist), a Viśiṣṭādvaitist (Quasi-Monist) and an Advaitist (Monist) rolled into one. Let us try to explain what we mean by this.

Before doing so, first let us note that all the systems of Vedanta are unanimous on this point that any being — human or just any being for that matter — is apparently a body-mind complex but in reality the pure and blissful immortal Atman — the source of all divine qualities. He has merely forgotten his real nature. All are also unanimous that the Ultimate Reality behind the universe is Satchidananda (Infinite Existence - Infinite Knowledge -Infinite Bliss). Yet, according to Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita, that Reality (God) is a Supreme Person, Who can be loved, worshipped, prayed to as Father or Mother or Master or Friend. Liberation lies in knowing (or realizing) our own nature as Atman, and in loving and knowing God (or Brahman) Who is *Saguṇa*, full of the most auspicious attributes. According to the Dvaita system, a *jīva*, an individual soul, is similar in nature to God but *always separate or distinct from God;* while according to Viśiṣṭādvaita, an individual soul (*jīva*) is *a part and parcel of God*. The individual's body is a part of His Body. And

1. *See* Swami Satprakashananda, *Sri Ramakrishna's Life and Message in the Present Age* (St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.: Vedanta Society, 1976), pp. 38–51. [Hereafter, *Life and Message*.]

2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 3, p. 233. [Hereafter, *Complete Works*.]

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God or Īśvara is the Supreme Soul within the individual's soul — the Inner Controller (*Antaryāmin*) of all beings and things.

The Advaita System holds that God (*Saguṇa* Brahman) Who is worshipped, loved and prayed to, is not the Ultimate Reality but that He is the most magnificent manifestation of the *Ultimate Reality* which is *Nirguṇa* Brahman (Brahman without attributes). *Nirguṇa* Brahman can be negatively described as *Sat* (not non-existence), as *Cit* (not unconscious), and as *Ānanda* (not non-blissful). It is not that there are two Brahmans, *Saguṇa* and *Nirguṇa*. There is really one Brahman, who is realized as *Saguṇa* or *Nirguṇa*. The Advaita System of Śrī Śaṅkara asserts the *Nirguṇa* aspect to be the Supreme Reality which manifests Himself or Itself as *Saguṇa* with the help of His/Its inherent *Māyā Śakti*. According to this system, the real nature of an individual also is pure Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. Liberation lies in realizing one's own *identity with* Nirguṇa *Brahman*.

Sri Ramakrishna's Vedantic Realization through Bhakti Sādhanās

It is well known that Sri Ramakrishna started his *sādhanā* (spiritual practice) with the worship of the Ultimate Reality in the form of Mother Kāli — which is apparently a dualistic *sādhanā*, and that he ended his Hindu *sādhanās* with the *sādhanā* of Advaita (Monism) under the guidance of his Guru, Totapuri. But the truth is that he was not first a Dualist (Dvaitin), then he became a Qualified Monist (Viśiṣṭādvaitin) and finally ended by becoming a Monist (Advaitin). Rather, the truth is that his Dvaita or Viśiṣṭādvaita *sādhanās* were not totally confined within the domain of Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita ideas — completely detached from Advaita ideas. These *sādhanās* also led him to the Monistic (Advaitic) realization, the realization of the nameless, formless, attributeless Brahman and the identity Atman-Brahman.

Let us remind ourselves of his various experiences of Mother Kāli. He was found at times praying to have a vision of the most beautiful, benevolent form of the Divine Mother and then actually having the vision of that living form, as if he and the Divine Mother were two separate entities. This is apparently a dualistic (Dvaita) realization. But even during the period of that *Kali-sadhana*, nay, even on the very day of his having the first vision of Mother Kali, he had a realization of Her 'not only in form but as Supreme Consciousness'[3], as 'a boundless, infinite, conscious sea of light' (*Ananta-cetanjyoti-samudra*, in original Bengali) which 'coming ... from all sides with a great speed...' fell on him and made him 'sink to the unknown bottom'[4]. Now, this realization of Sri Ramakrishna can be taken to be a figurative description of an experience which is akin to (if not the same as) the Advaitic (Non-Dualistic or Monistic) realization in which the distinction between the Knower, the Knowledge and the Known is totally effaced. At some other state or mood of his mind, he used to experience the Divine Mother Kāli as neither separate from his Soul nor completely identical with it but as his indwelling soul — the Supreme Soul within his soul (*Antaryāmin*). From that experience he used to say,

> I am the machine and God is the Operator. I am the house and He is the Indweller. I am the machine and He is the Engineer. I am the chariot and He is the Charioteer. I move as He moves me....[5]

This is clearly a Viśiṣṭādvaitic (Qualified Non-Dualistic or Quasi-Monistic) realization. Again, at other times he used to feel and

3. Cf.: *Life and Message*, pp. 43–44.
4. *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*, tr. Swami Jagadananda, from original in Bengali in five volumes by Swami Saradananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1956), p. 141. [Hereafter, *Great Master*.]
5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, tr. Swami Nikhilananda, original in Bengali by 'M.' (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1994), p. 632. [Hereafter, *Gospel*.]

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experience that Divine Mother or God or Brahman had become everything, every being including his own ego. About this type of experience he said,

> The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kāli temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me everything was full of Consciousness. The Image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness — all was Consciousness.[6]

This is also a kind of Monistic realization with a semblance of diversity. It is Monistic because only one element (Consciousness) and not two (matter, i.e., *acit*, and Consciousness, i.e. *cit* as in Quasi-Monistic Vedanta) is perceived here. Some[7] consider it as a case of Quasi-Monistic Vedanta (Viśiṣṭādvaita) since a perception of diversity (or *Svagatabheda*) is there. Sri Ramakrishna, however, calls this realization — that everything is Consciousness — to be the realization of a Vijñāni (one endowed with a special knowledge of Brahman, the Absolute).[8]

According to him this realization is attained both by a *jñāna-sādhaka* as well as by a *bhakti-sādhaka*. He says, 'Who is the best devotee of God (*uttama bhakta*)? It is he who sees, after the realization of Brahman, that God alone has become all living beings, the universe and the twenty-four cosmic principles.'[9] His statements in this regard are in perfect accord with the *Bhagavad Gītā* (VII.19) which says, 'At the end of many births, the man of knowledge takes refuge in Me, realizing that all this is Vāsudeva.'

Sri Ramakrishna's Kāli *sādhanā* gave him the realization that Kāli is Brahman and Brahman is Kāli. However, his conception of Kāli was much different from the popular conception of Kāli that She is only *Saguṇa* (with attributes). Sri Ramakrishna used to consider Her as both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* (without attributes). Viewed through personal aspects, She is *saguṇa*, while viewed through impersonal aspect, She is *nirguṇa*. So, according to him, there was no difference between Kāli and Brahman except in name.[10] His experience in this regard perfectly tallied with that of Ramprasad who had also declared that Kāli is Brahman.

Sri Ramakrishna had this type of Dualistic, Quasi-Monistic and Monistic realizations during his Rama-*sādhanā* and Krishna-*sādhanā* also. His spiritual realization at the culmination of his Rama-*sādhanā* is described through a popular Hindi couplet: 'Rama, who is the son of Dasharatha, is in every being; the same Rama is immanent in the universe and yet transcends it.'[11] Thus Rama was experienced not merely as King Dasharatha's son (a Dualistic realization) but as residing in all beings (a Quasi-Monistic realization). Again, He was also realized as existent in His attributeless nature devoid of *Māyā* and beyond everything in the universe (a Monistic or Advaitic realization).[12] About the realizations of his Krishna-*sādhanā*, Swami Saradananda

6. *Gospel*, p. 345.
7. *Great Master*, pp. 299-300.
8. *Gospel*, p. 103. The distinction between the concepts of Viśiṣṭādvaita and that of a Vijñāni is subtle. The Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy asserts that God is present *in* all things and beings (*jagat* and *jiva*) which constitute His body [made of *cit* (consciousness) and *acit* (universe or matter)]. A Vijñāni may also perceive this at one stage but he also perceives later that God (Brahman, Consciousness) is present or manifest *as* all things and beings. He then perceives no *acit*, i.e., nothing other than consciousness.
9. *Gospel*, p. 271.
10. Sri Ramakrishna says, '...that which is Brahman with attributes is verily Brahman without attributes, that which is Brahman is verily Śakti.' *Gospel*, p. 636. He also says, 'What you call Brahman I call Kāli.' *Gospel*, p. 734.
11. *Great Master*, p. 215.
12. *Great Master*, p. 215.

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writes:

> We have heard from the Master himself that at that time he lost himself completely in the thought of Krishna and sometimes regarded himself as Krishna, and regarded all beings, from Brahma down to a blade of grass, as forms of Krishna.[13]

Sri Ramakrishna sometimes spoke in an ecstatic mood:

> Krishna! Krishna! Krishna! Krishna Satchidananda! Nowadays I do not see Your form. Now I see You both inside me and outside. I see that it is You who have become the universe, all living beings, the twenty-four cosmic principles, and everything else.... O Krishna! You are my life. O Krishna! You are my mind. O Krishna! You are my intelligence. O Krishna! You are my soul. O Govinda! You are my life-breath. You are my life itself.[14]

Swami Saradananda has pointed out that through his Islam Sadhana also Sri Ramakrishna first realized Brahman (Allāh) with attributes (*Saguṇa*) and then as beyond attributes (*Nirguṇa*).[15]

Sri Ramakrishna once described how meditation on God with form gradually leads one to the realization of formless God or God as Indivisible Consciousness. Said he:

> By meditating on Kāli the aspirant realizes God as Kāli. Next he finds that the form merges in the Indivisible Absolute. That which is Indivisible Satchidananda is verily Kāli.[16]

That meditation on God (*Saguṇa* Brahman) gradually leads to the realization of the Absolute (*Nirguṇa* Brahman) is supported in both the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. In the former, Sri Krishna tells Uddhava how by starting his meditation on God with form a devotee can realize God as Pure Consciousness simultaneously present within him and all-pervading — as 'Light united to Light'[17]. In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, (XVIII.55) Sri Krishna says to Arjuna, 'Through devotion, (the devotee) knows Me in reality as to what and who I am. Then having known Me in truth he enters (into Me).' Thus, all the devotional *sādhanās* of Sri Ramakrishna enabled him to realize that through the practice of *bhakti*, Advaitic realization can also be attained. So he said:

> ...if a person seeks the Knowledge of Brahman he can attain It by following the path of bhakti, too. God, who loves His devotee, can give him the Knowledge of Brahman if He so desires. But the bhakta wants to realize the Personal God endowed with form and talk to Him. He seldom seeks the Knowledge of Brahman.[18]

The Gopis and Sri Chaitanya (the great exemplars of devotion to God) were, according to Sri Ramakrishna, knowers of Brahman — the Absolute.[19]

By studying Sri Ramakrishna's words it seems to us that there are two stages in the Monistic realizations of a *bhakta*. At one stage his Chosen Deity (*Iṣṭa Devatā*) is realized as pure formless Consciousness in which the devotee's individual ego-consciousness loses its separate existence (as in *nirvikalpa samādhi*). Another is the stage of a *vijñāni* (to use Sri Ramakrishna's own term) where the devotee sees his Chosen Deity as Pure Consciousness and the whole universe (including his own mind, body and soul) as made of the same Consciousness.

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13. *Great Master*, p. 239.
14. *Gospel*, pp. 440–1.
15. *Great Master*, p. 260.
16. *Gospel*, p. 412.
17. *Śrimad Bhāgavatam*, XI.14.42–5, quoted by Swami Satprakashananda in *The Universe, God and God-Realization* (St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.: Vedanta Society, 1977), p. 251.
18. *Gospel*, p. 468.
19. 'The Gopis of Vrindavan, too, attained the Knowledge of Brahman; but they were not seeking It.' — *Gospel*, p. 501. 'Chaitanyadeva's knowledge had the brilliance of the sun — the sun of Knowledge. Further, he radiated the soothing light of the moon of Devotion. He was endowed with both — the Knowledge of Brahman and ecstatic love of God.' — *Gospel*, p. 485.

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Sri Ramakrishna's Vedantic Realization through Advaita Sādhanā

Under his Guru Totapuri, a philosopher-saint of Śrī Śaṅkara Advaita Vedanta system, Sri Ramakrishna finally practised Advaita Vedanta. He then realized the attributeless, formless Reality (*Nirguṇa* Brahman) and the identity of his individual Self with That in *nirvikalpa samādhi* — the highest type of *samādhi*, an unspeakable experience of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Consciousness in which the distinction between the knower, knowledge and known is completely obliterated. For six months at a stretch his mind remained almost completely merged in that *samādhi* except at some irregular hours when an unknown guest monk at Dakshineswar would somehow bring his mind to the level of the body, with awareness enough to take a few morsels of food. Thus, his body survived this utmost privation. As a result of long and repeated practice of this type of *samādhi*, he used to have another type of experience when his mind came down to the plane of outward consciousness. He then used to feel himself as Atman-Brahman, and see the same Atman-Brahman everywhere, in all beings, in everything — animate and inanimate.[20] Consequently, he felt the pleasure and pain of any living being who happened to be in his presence as his own pleasure and pain. When two boatmen on a boat on the Ganga quarreled and one of them slapped the other's back, Sri Ramakrishna felt agonizing pain of the suffering boatman on his own back and cried out piteously. When someone was walking on a green grassy field in his presence, he felt suffocated as if the person was treading on his own chest. So the concept of *sarvātma-bhāva* (all are my very Self)[21] of Advaita Vedanta was a vivid fact of his personal experience.

We have already mentioned that to see and feel Atman-Brahman (after the experience of *nirvikalpa samādhi*) in all things and beings including one's own mind-body has

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20. Śaṅkara describes this type of experience in *Dṛk-dṛśya-viveka*, verse no. 30 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1976), p. 39.
देहाभिमाने गलिते विज्ञाते परमात्मनि।
यत्र यत्र मनो याति तत्र तत्र समाधयः॥
The annotator has observed on this verse: 'As a result of constant practice of *Samādhi* described above, it becomes subsequently quite natural and spontaneous. Then the seeker realizes Brahman everywhere' (p. 39). The word 'high' (in the 'highest' type of *Samādhi*) or 'down' (in 'his mind came down') signifies neither spatial highness or lowness nor anything superior or inferior. The 'highest' here means largest unity conceivable by the human mind. To explain — Dvaita (Dualism) recognizes ultimate reality of three categories: (i) God, (ii) souls, and (iii) the universe. The Viśiṣṭādvaita (Qualified Non-Dualism) recognizes the ultimate reality of one Organic Whole (Brahman) of which individual souls and the universe are eternal parts — one Brahman with inner divisions or *Svagatabheda*. The Non-Dualism or Advaita recognizes the ultimate reality of one Brahman (pure consciousness) without even this *Svagatabheda*, i.e., without any division outside or inside. It is a homogeneous Unity of consciousness. Human mind cannot conceive of any unity beyond that. '...we cannot go any further, because we cannot go beyond unity. When a science reaches unity, it cannot by any means go any further,' says Swami Vivekananda (*Complete Works*, vol. 1, p. 403.) Even a *Vijñāni* cannot conceive of or experience anything beyond this unity. But the *Vijñāni's* perception that all are Brahman comes to him after his repeated experience of *Nirvikalpa Samādhi*. Extraordinary Brahmajñānis like Śaṅkara, Chaitanyadeva, Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and others can become such *Vijñānis*.

21. 'To realize the whole universe as the Self is the means of getting rid of bondage. There is nothing higher than identifying the universe with the Self.' Śaṅkara's *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, verse no. 339.

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been termed by Sri Ramakrishna as the realization of a *vijñāni*.[22] According to him, this stage is attained at a post-Brahmajñāna, therefore post-*nirvikalpa*-samādhi, stage and at a much advanced stage of Brahmajñāna. One should not entertain any doubt that this concept of *vijñāna* or *vijñāni* is alien to traditional Vedanta or Advaita Vedanta. Although the term *vijñāni* is not used in this sense in the Upaniṣads, the idea is very clearly stated there.[23] For example, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (III.14.1) says, 'All this is Brahman, *sarvam khalvidam brahma*'. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (II.ii.11) also states, 'All this that is in front is but Brahman — the Immortal. Brahman is at the back as also on the right and the left. It is extended above and below too. The world is nothing but Brahman — the highest'.

We have already noted that this highest knowledge of Atman-Brahman identity is attained both by the *Jñāna sādhaka* and the *Bhakti sādhaka*. Thus Sri Ramakrishna speaks of four broad levels of spiritual realizations: (a) Dualistic (Dvaitic), (b) Qualified Non-Dualistic (Viśiṣṭādvaitic), (c) Advaitic at the level of *nirvikalpa samādhi* stage called *Jñāni* level, and (d) Advaitic at the post-*nirvikalpa samādhi* stage called *Vijñāni* level. According to the terminology of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, Advaita as realized in the *nirvikalpa samādhi* plane alone is called the *pāramārthika* (transcendental) level of existence — where there is no trace of duality or diversity, or the knower-knowledge-known relation. Our normal level of consciousness, even our realization of the Personal God (*Saguṇa* Brahman), he says, belongs to the *vyāvahārika* (empirical) level. Sri Ramakrishna has not used these technical terms of Śrī Śaṅkara. What he has said is that these realizations come to a *jñāna* or a *bhakti* seeker of truth one after another. They are not contradictory but complementary, one psychological level gradually leading to the next psychological level. They finally lead to the level of Advaita, which deepened by repeated practice, spontaneously gives rise to the level of the *Vijñāni*.

Also, Sri Ramakrishna does not say that the realization of Reality at any particular level is inferior to its realization at another level. His mind could move to any of the four spiritual levels at any time and could stay with perfect ease and joy at that level as long as he liked. A spiritual seeker, usually after life-long effort or after efforts in many human births, can attain spiritual realization in *samādhi* and does not like to move to any other level of experience; nay, he even derides the validity of the other levels. He or she derides the realizations of the other levels of Vedanta thinking that they are inferior or wrong. A rare person attains to the stage of Advaita of the *vijñāni's* level. But this was not so with Sri Ramakrishna. He was like a prince in the palace of the many-storeyed realizations of the Supreme. 'There is,' he says, 'for instance, the seven-storey palace of a King. Strangers have access only to the lower apartments; but the prince, who, knows the palace to be his own, can move up and down from floor to

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22. Sri Ramakrishna says:

> But there is a stage beyond even Brahmajñāna. After Jñāna comes Vijñāna.... To know by one's inner experience that God exists is Jñāna. But to talk to Him, to enjoy Him as Child, as Friend, as Master, as Beloved is Vijñāna. — *Gospel, pp. 287–8.*
>
> You want to climb to the roof; then you must eliminate and leave behind all the steps, one by one. The steps are by no means the roof. But after reaching the roof you find that the steps are made of the same materials — brick, lime, and brick-dust — as the roof. It is the Supreme Brahman that has become the universe and its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. — Ibid., p. 417.

23. Vide 'Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and Advaita-vada', in Swami Shraddhananda, *Vandi Tomāy: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhāvāñjali* (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1983), p. 139. [Hereafter, *Vandi Tomāy*.]

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floor.'[24]

Sri Ramakrishna's 'Vedanta of Harmony'
(Samanvayī Vedanta)

The Vedanta that we find demonstrated in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna is, therefore, called by some eminent thinkers *Samanvayī* Vedanta (Vedanta of Harmony).[25] Others again call it *Samanvayī* Advaita Vedanta (Advaita Vedanta of Harmony).[26] The keynote of this Vedanta is *'Yata mat, tata path*, As many faiths, so many paths'. It means that all religions (and, therefore, all schools of philosophy — philosophy being the core of religion) are like different paths leading to the same goal which is God or Reality. Each of the philosophical schools reveals one aspect of the Ultimate Reality. So all the views are to be honoured and respected as valid. But none of the views shows the whole picture of Reality. Since the ultimate truth is infinite, how can a school of philosophy with a finite view state the whole of the infinite truth it is trying to comprehend? After declaring 'As many faiths, so many paths', Sri Ramakrishna says: 'No one can put a limit to spiritual experience. If you refer to one experience, there is another beyond that, and still another, and so on!'[27] He often asked spiritual seekers not 'to put a limit to the nature of God'[28]. His famous words 'As many faiths, so many paths', are only a re-affirmation of the *Ṛg-Vedic* utterance, *'Ekaṁ sat viprā bahudhā vadanti*, Truth is One; sages describe It variously'.[29] But it is a re-affirmation made not on the basis of his intellectual reasoning but on the basis of his verifying the truth of the major religions of the world by experiencing God or Reality through each of them. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that this verification of so many religions by one person through personal experience is indeed a unique phenomenon in the spiritual history of mankind. But we are not going to discuss that aspect in this paper. The main point we need to emphasize is that these three schools of Vedanta are harmonious — taken together they make the whole of Vedanta, and the bliss of Advaita marks the culmination of each of the schools. Swami Vivekananda preached this harmony and this truth, but he also said that he had learnt it from Sri Ramakrishna. Sister Nivedita in her *Master As I Saw Him* wrote in this connection:[30]

> Hitherto the three philosophic systems of Unism [Monism], Dualism and Qualified Unism or Advaita, Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita — had been regarded as offering to the soul three different ideals of liberation. No attempt had ever before been made to reconcile these schools. On reaching Madras however, in 1897, Vivekananda boldly claimed that even the utmost realizations of Dualism, Modified Unism were but stages on the way to Unism itself; and the final bliss for all alike, was the mergence in the One without a second.

In his lecture on 'Vedanta and Indian Life' Swami Vivekananda spoke in 1897 in Chennai on Sri Ramakrishna's contribution to Vedanta in this way:[31]

> Coming to our commentators again, we find another difficulty. The Advaitic commentator, whenever an Advaitic text comes, preserves it just as it is; but the same commentator, as soon as a dualistic text presents itself, tortures it if he can, and brings the most queer meaning out of it.... In the same way, if not in a still worse fashion, the texts are handled by the dualistic commentator. Every dualistic text is preserved, and every text that speaks of non-dualistic philosophy is tortured in any fashion

24. *Gospel*, p. 562.
25. *See* Dr. S.C. Chatterjee, *Classical Indian Philosophies, Their Synthesis in the Philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna*, 1985, p. 149.
26. *See* Swami Shraddhananda, *Vandi Tomāy*, p. 138.
27. *Gospel*, p. 624.
28. *Great Master*, p. 763.
29. *Ṛg-Veda*, 1.146.46.
30. Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1959), p. 235.
31. *Complete Works*, vol. 3, p. 233–4.

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he likes.... It was given to me to live with a man who was as ardent a dualist, as ardent an Advaitist, as ardent a Bhakta, as a Jnani. And living with this man [Sri Ramakrishna] first put it into my head to understand the Upanishads and the texts of the scriptures from an independent and better basis than by blindly following the commentators; and in my opinion and in my researches, I came to the conclusion that these texts are not at all contradictory.... but wonderfully harmonious, one idea leading up to the other. But the one fact I found is that in all the Upanishads, they begin with dualistic ideas, with worship and all that, and end with a grand flourish of Advaitic ideas.... I now find in the light of this man's [Sri Ramakrishna's] life that the dualist and the Advaitist need not fight each other.... One cannot exist without the other; one is the fulfilment of the other; one is the building, the other is the top; the one the root, the other the fruit, and so on.

Once Swami Turiyananda, a great saint of Self-realization, an erudite scholar of Vedanta, and also a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna wrote in answer to a query:[32]

> It is not easy to speak about Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy.... The Ultimate Truth is one and non-dual. It is called by various names: Brahman, Paramatman, Bhagavan (Lord), God, and so on. Whosoever has realized that Truth has tried to express it according to his own temperament and understanding by giving [it] a particular name. *But nobody has been able to express the whole truth. What He is, He is — that is the final conclusion of those who have realized Him.*
>
> From different stand points, Gaudapada's doctrine of no creation (*Ajāta-vāda*), Śaṅkara's doctrine of superimposition (*Vivarta-vāda*), Ramanuja's doctrine of transformation (*Pariṇāma-vāda*) and Sri Kantha's doctrine of *Śivādvaita* — each one of these is true. Again, apart from all these doctrines, God is beyond all human expression and beyond the cognition of mind. The founders of all these philosophical systems practised austerities and, having received God's grace, they preached the various doctrines at His command. God is the subject from which these doctrines evolved. But He Himself is beyond them. The philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna is to express this truth. That is what I think. Hanuman said to Rama: *'O Lord, when I identify myself with the body, I am your servant, when I consider myself as an individual soul, I am a part of you. When I look upon myself as the Atman, I am one with you — this is my firm conviction.' Sri Ramakrishna referred to this statement as the best conclusion of the different phases of spiritual experience.*

Swami Saradananda, the writer of the most authentic biography of Sri Ramakrishna, corroborates Swami Vivekananda's and Swami Turiyananda's presentation of Sri Ramakrishna's Vedantic views. Sri Ramakrishna usually used to prescribe the path of devotion to *Saguṇa* Brahman (in the form of the Divine Mother or Divine Father or Divine Friend, and so on) since such a path was suited to the temperament and aptitude of common people. Swami Saradananda maintains that Sri Ramakrishna, in spite of his emphasizing the devotional path, accepted fully the Non-Dualism of Śaṅkara. He writes: 'The Master accepted all the doctrines of Non-Dualism (Advaita), Qualified Non-Dualism (Viśiṣṭādvaita) and Dualism (Dvaita). But he used to say:

> these three doctrines are accepted by the human mind according to the stage of its progress. In one stage of the mind Dualism finds acceptance; the other two are then felt to be wrong. In a higher stage of spiritual progress the doctrine of Qualified Non-Dualism is regarded as true; one then feels that the Reality which in Itself is eternally devoid of attributes exists in sport as always possessed of attributes. One then cannot but feel that not only is Dualism wrong but there is no truth in Non-Dualism also. Finally, when man reaches the ultimate limit of spiritual progress with the

32. Swami Chetanananda, *Spiritual Treasures: Letters of Swami Turiyananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994), pp. 195–6. Emphasis added by the author.

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help of *sādhanā*, he experiences the *Nirguṇa* nature of the divine Mother and remains in oneness with Her.[33] All the ideas, such as I and You, subject and object, bondage and liberation, vice and virtue, merit and demerit, etc. are then all merged in One.[34]

Saradanandaji quotes Sri Ramakrishna further as saying,

> Non-Dualism is not a matter to be described.... As long as there is thought, imagination, etc., there is Dualism within the mind, Non-Dual knowledge has not yet been attained.[35]

A study of the above statements of the three great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna reveals that:

(a) Sri Ramakrishna not only accepted the validity of the three major schools of Vedanta at the three stages of movement of the human mind, but added that even the three schools jointly or severally express only a partial view of the Ultimate Infinite Reality, that none of them — not even Advaita Vedanta — *ipso facto* expresses the whole truth. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Ah, it is true He is with forms and it is equally true that He is without forms; who knows what else He is, besides these![36]

(b) He has shown that these three stages are interdependent and interrelated. The devotees' (the Dualist's and the Qualified Monist's) journey to their Chosen Deity cannot be said to be completed until they have the realization of their own identity with their *Iṣṭa* (Chosen Deity), then viewed as a mass of Consciousness (as in the *nirvikalpa samādhi* stage), which again is followed by a stage of seeing the same *Iṣṭa* present in all things and beings (*vijñāni's* stage).

Similarly, an Advaitist or Monist can never dispense with the stage of Dvaita (Dualism) or Viśiṣṭādvaita (Quasi-Monism). Until the attainment of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, he has to live and think at any of those two levels. Even when he practises *nididhyāsana* (meditates on the truth 'I am Brahman'), he is not then one with Brahman but feels a subtle distinction between 'I' and Brahman, and is therefore within the realm of *Māyā*, within the domain of Dualism or Quasi-Monism. Not only an Advaita *sādhaka* necessarily passes through Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita before reaching Advaita (of the *nirvikalpa samādhi* stage), but after coming down from *nirvikalpa samādhi*, he necessarily comes down also to stations of Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita. He then sees the world and he himself in a new light; he sees then that all are Brahman, all are Existence-Knowledge-Bliss under the cover of 'name and form' — which in Sri Ramakrishna's language is the vision of a *vijñāni*.

We have stated earlier that Sri Ramakrishna was a Dualist, a Quasi-Monist, and also a Monist, but with a distinction of his own. He experienced and enjoyed the raptures of devotions through the divine relationship of Divine Mother, Son, Friend, Sweetheart, like any Dualist or Quasi-Monist devotee. But unlike the common run of such devotees, he believed in and experienced a higher stage of devotion where he realized his own identity with his Chosen Deity, both viewed as Pure Consciousness at that stage. We have used the phrases 'common run of such devotees' because there are liberal-minded devotees who accept as valid such stages of devotion. But Dualists and Quasi-Monists (devotees) sometimes argue that although at a certain stage of development of devotion, a devotee *feels* his identity with the Chosen Ideal, still the distinction between his soul and his *Iṣṭa* remains intact, though in an unmanifested or unperceived manner, in that stage also. In other words, the 'felt identity'

33. '*Nirguṇa* nature of the Divine Mother' implies *Nirguṇa* Brahman.
34. *Great Master*, p. 388.
35. *Great Master*, p. 388.
36. *Great Master*, p. 375.

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does not imply 'real identity'.[37] Light, they point out, is perceived by the naked eye to be one homogeneous white something but it is a combination of seven colours. So, according to them, God and individual souls are eternally distinct from one another, although in *nirvikalpa samādhi* that distinction is not perceived. This is probably why they sometimes deride the metaphysical conclusion of total absorption of the Monists and look at them through a patronizing attitude. Sri Ramakrishna did not enter into such controversies. From his standpoint, this much can be said, that at a final stage of devotion, an identity and unity of existence is felt. This is a psychological fact vouchsafed by the highest *sādhakas* in different ages; it cannot be denied. But the nature of the Ultimate Infinite Reality can never be *exhaustively* known by any human mind or by any metaphysical school. So, as a Dualist or a Quasi-Monist, Sri Ramakrishna never had any such patronizing or derisive attitude towards the *jñānis*. Though a *bhakta*, he had deep love for and friendship with the Monists because he saw that they were experiencing or meeting the same Ultimate Reality as the devotees (the Dualists and the Quasi-Monists) were.

Similarly, Sri Ramakrishna was also an Advaitist with a distinction of his own. Sometimes a section of orthodox Monists consider themselves to be superior or holier than the Dualists or Quasi-Monists, and consider that the devotees are wrong in resorting to devotional practices which pertain to the empirical level. Such Advaitists believe that they themselves live in the highest *pāramārthika* (transcendental) plane, while the Dualists or Quasi-Monists live in *vyāvahārika* (empirical) plane. In Sri Ramakrishna's view, the Advaitins experience one aspect (the formless or attributeless) of the Ultimate Infinite Truth, while the Dualists and Quasi-Monists experience another aspect (endowed with attributes and form) of the Truth, and so the question of one being inferior or superior to the other does not arise. Moreover, except in the *nirvikalpa samādhi* stage, the Advaitin necessarily lives, as much as a Dvaitin and a Viśiṣṭādvaitin do, in the *vyāvahārika* (empirical) level — since no action for the maintenance of the body, not even for the practice of Advaita *sādhanā* is possible except in the empirical plane.

So, though an Advaitin, Sri Ramakrishna was all love towards the devotees (the Dualists and the Qualified Monists). When his mind occupied itself with God, devotees, and devotion, he never thought that he was living at an inferior level of spirituality. He used to say that one cannot live long in the highest plane of *nirvikalpa:* one perforce has to come down to the devotional plane. He was of the type of Advaitin who are described in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* in a beautiful verse:

Ātmārāmāśca munayo
nirgranthā adhakrame;
Kurvantyahaitukī bhaktim-
itthambhūtaguṇorhariḥ. (1.7.10)

Even sages who delight in the Self alone and the knot of whose ignorance has been cut asunder, practise disinterested devotion to Hari: Such are His virtues.

Sri Ramakrishna, Śrī Śaṅkara and Śrī Rāmānuja

Sri Ramakrishna and the monastic order emanating from him belong to the Advaita Order of Śrī Śaṅkara in another special sense. This special sense is that it has formally originated from Sri Ramakrishna's Guru, Totapuri, who belonged to the Puri class, one of the ten classes of the monastic order organized by Śrī Śaṅkara, the greatest advocate of Non-Dualistic Vedanta.

Sometimes it is suggested by some thinkers that Sri Ramakrishna did not accept the pure Advaita Vedanta of Śrī Śaṅkara because he said, 'Why should the universe be

37. Swami Tapasyananda, *Spiritual Quest* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1992), pp. 219–20.

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unreal? That is a speculation of the philosophers.'[38] And he also said many times that 'Kāli is Brahman, Brahman is Kāli.' According to these thinkers, if at all Sri Ramakrishna is to be called an Advaitin, he should be called a *Śākta*-Advaitin, i.e., not a pure or cent per cent Advaitin. This contention does not seem to be tenable. We have already seen that Sri Ramakrishna's acceptance of Śrī Śaṅkara's Non-Dual Vedanta Philosophy has been clearly affirmed by Swamis Saradananda, Turiyananda and Vivekananda.

Secondly, Sri Ramakrishna himself said unambiguously, 'Śaṅkara's Non-Dualistic explanation of Vedanta is true, and so is the Qualified Non-Dualistic interpretation of Rāmānuja.'[39]

Thirdly, there are many utterances of Sri Ramakrishna scattered in the pages of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which imply that the world cannot be said to be unreal (in the sense of its being a void or non-existent) but it is all *Cit* or Consciousness.[40] In fact, the real meaning of 'the world is unreal' of Śaṅkara is that 'all is Brahman'. But even this vision of Reality ('All is Brahman') disappears and only unspeakable existence or Brahman remains when the 'I'-consciousness or 'ego'-sense is completely effaced. To quote Sri Ramakrishna, 'But what remains when God completely effaces the ego cannot be described in words.'[41] 'As long as he (i.e., a spiritual seeker) is conscious of "I", he is conscious of others also. Nothing whatsoever exists after he cuts through the whole thing with the sword of *jñāna*. Then even this "I" becomes as unreal as the magic of the magician.[42]

Fourthly, by speaking of Kāli or *Śakti*, Sri Ramakrishna did not speak against Śaṅkara's philosophy or the Upaniṣads. It is wrong to suppose that Śaṅkara was against the idea of *Śakti* (Primordial Energy or Power) in Brahman. According to him, the Power by which Brahman projects the universe or favours the devotees is non-different from Brahman.[43] By accepting the empirical validity of the Power of God, Śaṅkara had to perform the enormous work of preaching, writing and teaching. Sri Ramakrishna did the same work of preaching and imparting spirituality in his own way. Like Śaṅkarācārya, Sri Ramakrishna too did not admit the existence of Śakti as dynamic energy in *nirvikalpa samādhi*. *Śakti* may then be said to be there only as Brahman. According to him, Kāli may be likened to a snake with movement or an ocean with waves, while Brahman is like a snake without movement or an ocean without waves and currents.

So far as the Upaniṣads are concerned, we find that the *Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad* (1.3) declares *Śakti* (the Power) that is identical with Brahman to be the cause of the universe. The *Kena Upaniṣad* in Section IV speaks of the same *Śakti* of Brahman through the allegory of Umā Haimavatī. So, according to Śaṅkarācārya, *Māyā* is not merely a theoretical explanation of the universe. He has accepted *Māyā* as the *Śakti* (or Power) of Brahman.[44]

Although there is no fundamental difference between the philosophical position held by Śrī Śaṅkara and that implied in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, still one finds a special emphasis on the *vijñāni's* stage of *Brahmajñāna* in Sri Ramakrishna's talks and teachings which is absent or at least not prominent in Śrī Śaṅkara's. The glory, bliss and grandeur of *nirvikalpa samādhi* is described in glowing

38. *Gospel*, p. 345.
39. *Gospel*, p. 733.
40. *Gospel*, p. 345.
41. *Gospel*, p. 346.
42. *Gospel*, p. 460.

43. Śaṅkara writes in his commentary on *Bhagavad Gītā*, (XIV.27): 'The Power of God through which Brahman sets out, comes forth for the purpose of favouring the devotees etc. which is Brahman Himself, am I. For a Power and a Possessor of that Power are non-different (*Śakti-śaktimatoḥ ananyāt*).
44. Swami Gambhirananda, *Kaḷi Panthāḥ* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1981), p. 51.

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terms and is repeatedly alluded to as a much coveted goal in Śaṅkara's writings but not so is the experience, the beauty and the glory of the *vijñāni* stage — the experience that all is Brahman, that all is *Cit* or Consciousness — that God has become everything and every being. In Sri Ramakrishna's talks and conversations the picture is different. He now and then affirms the exalted state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* but repeatedly describes the experience of the post-*nirvikalpa* stage, the stage of the *vijñāni*, as an ideal to be accepted and to be followed even in the day-to-day life of a lay devotee, a monk or a house-holder. Orthodox followers of Śrī Śaṅkara would encourage spiritual seekers to practise *neti, neti* ('not this', 'not this', i.e., to discriminate and understand that everything — 'this' — with name and form is unreal, impermanent and rejectable) and then to meditate on the attributeless (*Nirguṇa*) Brahman till the dawn of realization.

Sri Ramakrishna, on the other hand, lived most of his time (especially after the *sādhanā*-period of his life) on the plane of the *vijñāni* and palpably felt and saw that it is Brahman as God or Mother who is manifest as everything, every being — big and small, honest and dishonest, saint and sinner, under the cover of innumerable names and forms. As a result of this realization, he became not only an embodiment of the highest spiritual knowledge but also an embodiment of universal love, compassion and service to all. He saw all creatures only as a manifestation of God and served them as he would God. Of course, he was not capable of serving others physically with material goods, but he used to serve them with the greatest of gifts — the gift of spiritual knowledge. The general burden of his spiritual teaching to people in general was that they should look upon, love, and serve all around them — their sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, parents, neighbours, fellow-citizens or foreigners — as Atman, as divine, as God's manifestation or children. So his advice or practical application is to serve God-in-Man or 'serve *jīva* as *śiva*, *Śiva-jñāne jīva-sevā*'.

Service performed with such a spiritual attitude purifies the mind and ultimately brings about the actual realization that both the server and the served are divine, manifesting the One Atman-Brahman. This aspect of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings had been rationally and systematically presented by Swami Vivekananda as Practical Vedanta. Many thinkers prefer to call it 'Neo-Vedanta'[45] — Vedanta applied in day-to-day situations of life, Vedanta that emphasizes the divinity of each soul and insists on love for and service to that divinity that exists in all.

In passing we may note in this connection, that perhaps it was necessary for Śrī Śaṅkara to emphasize the goal of *nirvikalpa samādhi* against the background of the contemporary nihilism of a vast section of Buddhists and the ritualism of the Mīmāṁsakas. Similarly, Sri Ramakrishna's emphasis on the ideal of the *vijñāni's* stage — on seeing God in all, on loving and serving all as God — has most appropriately fulfilled the need and the highest aspirations of modern man. This ideal is also most conducive to and in perfect harmony with the taste, temperament and mental disposition of modern enlightened persons all over the globe.

We conclude by summarizing the practical applications of Vedanta as demonstrated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna:

1. Sri Ramakrishna's Vedanta teaches us (i) to look upon ourselves and all others around us not as material bodies or mind-body complexes, but as identical with our true Self (Atman-Brahman) with a Non-Dualistic attitude, or as part and parcel of the one Indivisible Brahman following the Qualified Non-Dualistic attitude, or as

45. *See* 'Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism and Its Practical Application', in Dr. Satish Chandra Chatterjee, *Vivekananda, the Great Spiritual Teacher* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1995), pp. 255–80.

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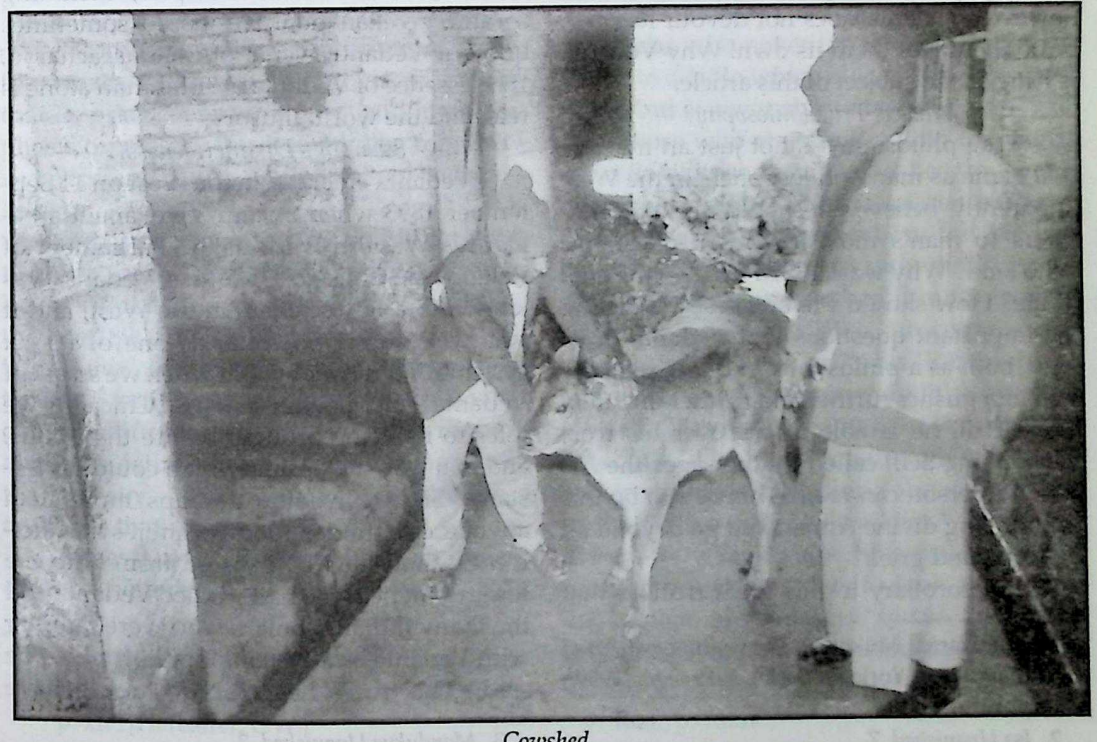
children or friends or servants of the Infinite Brahman keeping the Dualistic attitude, and (ii) to love and serve all around us in accordance with that attitude.

2. Attitudes and views of Reality and of the Soul of man under the names of Dualism, Qualified Non-Dualism and Non-Dualism are all true — they are realized as different stages in our spiritual journey. Our psychological constitution is such that the Non-Dual stage is attained at the final stage. So, we should cherish love and respect also for each view, each religion, each school of philosophy. Therefore, harmony of religions is a necessary product of his applied Vedanta.

3. Unselfish work, devotion, meditation and discrimination (*Karma, Bhakti, Dhyāna* and *Jñāna*) are the means for the realization of Atman or God. All these means are to be respected and resorted to in day-to-day life. So, harmony and synthesis of these four means is another product of his applied Vedanta. ❐



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The Vedanta Lion Emerges

MS. SUSAN WALTERS

The author highlights in this article four salient contributions in Swamiji's preaching of Vedanta: 'first, their pragmatic, that is, practical approach; second, their emphasis on reason; third, their all-comprehensiveness; and fourth, their spiritual basis.' Being an experiencer of the universal truths of Vedanta, Swamiji not only interpreted the lofty principles of Vedanta in a language easily understood even by the uninitiated, but also highlighted the practical application of these truths in our day-to-day life. Upon this depends the wellbeing of the individual and the strengthening of the social, political, economic, cultural and religious structure.

'All scriptures become mute when the Vedanta lion emerges just as the jackals which raise their voices in the forest lapse into silence as they encounter the lion.'[1]

This is the place that Vedanta has held in the hearts and minds of Indian scholars down through the ages, and even today. As the lion is the king of beasts, Vedanta is the King of philosophy and religion. Unlike the lion, however, Vedanta does not devour its prey, but only makes them its own. Why Vedanta is King, is the subject of this article.

What is True Philosophy?

True philosophy is not just an intellectual game as many philosophers in the West apparently believe. It should seek the answers to man's most important questions: Who am I? Why was I born? What is the goal of life? How should I live? These are among the important questions that Vedanta deals with, both as a philosophy and as a religion. Vedanta pushes further and further into man himself till he is able to discover his true, unchanging Self, called by the sages the Atman. A person can realize himself to be this unchanging divine Atman and go beyond all delusion and grief.[2]

The corollary to this great truth is that the divine Atman that dwells within man and all creatures is identical with the divine Reality at the centre of the universe called Brahman. 'This Atman is Brahman,'[3] says one of the four *Mahāvākyas* which express the gist of the Upanishads (also known as Vedanta). Sri Ramakrishna bequeathed his understanding of and reverence for the universal teachings of Vedanta to all his disciples, including Swami Vivekananda. He would sometimes quote a Vedantic verse of Shankaracharya, 'The essence of Vedanta is "Brahman alone is real, and the world illusory."'

Swamiji's Distinctiveness

Vedanta emerged in the West on 11 September 1893 when Swami Vivekananda began his Western work at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Of course, Vedanta was known to a few scholars in the West, and it was well known in India as one of its six systems of philosophy. But when we speak of Vedanta emerging in 1893 in Chicago, we refer to its being brought before the public, and in a way the ordinary man could understand. Sister Nivedita, perhaps more than anyone else, understood Swamiji's distinctiveness, and how he differed from both the few in America who had studied Vedanta and the many Indian scholars who were familiar with Vedanta as a system of philosophy. She said: 'The truths he preached would have

1. Radhkamal Mukerjee, *The Culture and Art of India*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), p. 10.
2. *Isa Upanishad*, 7.
3. *Mandukya Upanishad*, 2.

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been as true had he never been born.'[4]

She went on to say that he taught with authority because he had 'plunged to the depths of realization which he preached'.[5] Because of Swamiji's deep spiritual insight, he could actually see what the ancient seers had seen, and could explain the fundamental Vedantic truths which most scholars could not fathom. Many Indian pundits and scholars who repeated the ancient Sanskrit texts which they greatly valued as God-given, could not understand their real meaning and so could not rightly teach them.

Thus it was Swamiji's greatness as an experiencer of the universal truths of Vedanta that made him the successful bearer of those truths to the world, and made him a lion among men as Vedanta is the lion among philosophies.

II

Let us take a look at Swamiji's view of Vedanta. For the sake of our discussion we can classify some of his contributions under four main headings: first, their pragmatic, that is, practical approach; second, their emphasis on reason; third, their all-comprehensiveness; and fourth, their spiritual basis.

First, the pragmatic approach. Pragmatism, one of the few schools of philosophy to have originated in America, was founded in the late 1890s by the Harvard professor, William James. He defined pragmatism in these terms: 'Grant an idea or belief to be true, what concrete difference will its being true make in anyone's actual life; ... true ideas are those that we can ... assimilate, verify. False ideas are those that we cannot.'[6]

James placed great emphasis on having direct experience. He said, 'The best way to show that a knife will not cut is to try to cut with it,'[7] by which he meant that merely studying about a knife won't give you much information; you have to try to use it. And the same is true of most things, either on a mundane level or a spiritual level. To be truly pragmatic in regard to spirituality or religion is to directly experience its truths. As Swamiji has said, 'If there is a God we must see Him, if there is a soul we must perceive it; otherwise it is better not to believe.'[8]

When Swamiji visited Boston in the 1890s he met William James. The two became good friends and had several long conversations together. However, Swamiji did not get his ideas of pragmatism from James. Pragmatism, though not called by that name, can be found in traditional Indian thought which places the highest value on having direct experience of the truths we study. The Vedas themselves acknowledge the limitation of their own words. They liken the students of the Vedas who never try to experience their truths to a ladle which always sits in a jug of nectar but is never able to taste it.

Those who are familiar with the words of Sri Ramakrishna will know how, over and over, he says that we must experience God — that is what we have been born for. Though he probably never heard the word, he was completely pragmatic when it came to spirituality and religion. 'Who can comprehend everything about God?' Sri Ramakrishna once asked, and then answered the question himself. 'It is not given to man to know any aspect of God, great or small. And what need is there to know everything about God? It is enough if we only realize Him.'[9] He didn't place a very high value on scholarship and compared mere scholars to fools who go to the mango orchard and spend their time counting the leaves. They should eat the man-

4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1990), vol. 1, p. xiv. [Hereafter, *C.W.*]
5. Ibid.
6. *William James' Writings, 1902–1910*, Library of America, 1978, p. 823.
7. Ibid., p. 1039.
8. *C.W.*, vol. 1, p. 127.
9. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1986), pp. 725–6.

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goes, he said. They should be pragmatic.

'Get away from all books and forms and let your soul see its Self,' says Swamiji. 'Experience is the only source of knowledge.'[10]

Second is Swamiji's emphasis on reason. Too often people have been told from childhood to accept certain ideas — often religious dogmas — unquestioningly. And too often these children end up believing all sorts of superstitions handed down through the family from age to age. 'Believe and do as I say,' children have been taught, 'Don't ask question.' But it is the nature of an intelligent child to ask questions. Actually the questions a child asks are an indication of one of its most precious possessions — its mind. It is this questioning mind that differentiates human beings from other forms of life. 'Plants may feel, lower animals may cognize, but humans can think. Man is the only animal that possesses reason, in Aristotle's view.'[11]

Swamiji had hard words for people who accept beliefs blindly. 'Their idea of belief may be better translated as "not-thinking-carelessness."' He went on to say that the sooner religion accepts the same methods of investigation that science does, the better it will be. He even goes so far as to say that, 'If a religion is destroyed by such investigations, it was then all the time useless, unworthy superstition; and the sooner it goes the better.'[12] However, he had confidence that religion — true religion — will survive this scrutiny, because unlike mathematics or chemistry, etc., it has an internal mandate to vouch for its truth.[13] 'The proof of religion depends on the truth of the constitution of man.'[14] And what is the 'truth of the constitution of man'? It is that in his essential nature he is the divine Impersonal Consciousness — the Absolute.

> The Absolute is unchangeable and immovable, and all the movements and changes are only in the phenomenal world, the limited. The whole is Impersonal, and within this Impersonal are all these various persons beginning with the lowest atom, up to God, the Personal God.... Such a Personal God is explicable as the highest manifestation of the Impersonal. You and I are very low manifestations, and the Personal God is the highest of which we can conceive.[15]

Thus reason takes us near to the door of the realization of Oneness, the ultimate goal of life.

Third is Vedanta's all-inclusiveness. There are several ways in which Vedanta is all-inclusive. It has a message for people at every stage of life. It is also concerned with all aspects of life — personal, social, political, economic, etc.; all branches of knowledge — science, art, music, literature, philosophy. And it is all-inclusive in relation to religion.

Let us see what message Vedanta has for people at different stages of life. To the youth, Swamiji's Vedanta gives the message of strength and fearlessness. He wanted young men and women to be strong in all ways — physically, mentally, morally. Only then could they face the many problems of life. Truth alone is strengthening and invigorating. And it was this knowledge of their inner divinity that would give them that strength and fearlessness. He said, 'Fill yourself with the thought of your almightiness, your majesty and glory,'[16] since, 'The remedy for weakness is not brooding over weakness, but thinking of strength.'[17] As he repeatedly said, the Upanishads are a mine of strength.

Adults living in the world will find the

10. *C.W.*, vol. 6, pp. 81, 82.
11. Swami Satprakashananda, *The Universe, God and God Realization* (St. Louis: St. Louis Vedanta Society, 1977), p. 126.
12. *C.W.*, vol. 1, p. 367.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 369.
15. *C.W.*, vol. 1, pp. 378–9.
16. *C.W.*, vol. 2, p. 302.
17. *C.W.*, vol. 2, p. 300.

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solution to many of their difficulties if they listen to Vedanta. Swamiji says, 'If the fisherman thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better fisherman; if the student thinks he is the Spirit, he will be a better student. If the lawyer thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better lawyer, and so on.... If you teach Vedanta to the fisherman, he will say, I am as good a man as you; I am a fisherman, you are a philosopher, but I have the same God in me as you have in you.'[18] Vedanta will rid us of our superstition, of our belief that we are puny little beings at the mercy of nature; it will make us stand on our feet. No one who knows his noble heritage can ever be ignoble in his deeds. What better heritage can one lay claim to than his inherent divine nature? Who ever answers our fervent prayers other than the divine within which never sleeps? As the Gita says, one has to raise oneself by oneself. One fails only when one does not strive sufficiently. A very pointed message indeed does Vedanta carry to the man of drooping spirits.

Vedanta's concern for all aspects of life can be summed up in Swamiji's statement, 'There is but one basis of well-being, social, political or spiritual — to know that I and my brother are one.'[19] Seeing anyone as the 'other', the object, is ignorance; that ignorance is the fountainhead of individual suffering, of all social misunderstanding, of political chaos, and of religious wars.

To the householder, Vedanta gives this insight: to serve all, including your relatives, as if they were your very own, but to know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you. To the monk, Vedanta gives this understanding: to plunge into the world of action with the idea of worship of the spirit by the spirit, yet retaining your inner calm by being rooted in the Self.

Swamiji's interest in all branches of learning is well known. He was expert in both vocal and instrumental music. He had read widely in history, philosophy and other subjects. He had studied different branches of science and knew much about them all. But he was aware that there was a limit to what they could discover. He said:

> Take any one of these material sciences, such as chemistry or physics, astronomy or biology — study it, push the study forward and forward, and the gross forms will begin to melt and become finer and finer, until they come to a point where you are bound to make a tremendous leap from these material things into the immaterial. The gross melts into the fine, physics into metaphysics, in every department of knowledge.[20]

About Vedanta's all-inclusiveness in relation to religion, we could quote innumerable passages, but perhaps the best known is this quotation from Swamiji speaking in California in January 1900:

> I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his Law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of every one.
>
> Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future.... We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future.... Salutation to all the prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future![21]

However, this all-inclusiveness in relation to religion comes from a comprehensive understanding of Vedanta itself as the mother of all religions:

18. C.W., vol. 3, pp. 245–6.
19. C.W., vol. 8, p. 350.
20. C.W., vol. 4, p. 204.
21. C.W., vol. 2, p. 374

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> All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary. This is the essential of religion: the Vedanta, applied to the various ethnic customs and creeds of India, is Hinduism. The first stage, i.e. Dvaita, applied to the ideas of the ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity; as applied to the Semitic groups, Mohammedanism. The Advaita, as applied in its Yoga-perception form, is Buddhism etc. Now by religion is meant the Vedanta; the applications must vary according to the different needs, surroundings, and other circumstances of different nations.[22]

Fourth and last is Vedanta's emphasis on the necessity of a spiritual basis for all enterprises. Of course this is nothing new for India where all the arts, economics, philosophies, social systems, etc. have been built on a spiritual basis. As we have seen, that spiritual basis stresses the divinity of man and his oneness with Brahman, the Centre and Soul of the universe. We are all one in Brahman.

Swamiji has pointed out that everywhere in India there is the idea of a spiritual soul which is the receptacle of all power, and that no Indian philosophy or religion teaches that you can get power or perfection from outside. That is the Vedantic ideal.

The Vedanta Lion Attacks

Because these beautiful and vital Vedantic ideas and ideals have not been properly understood and interpreted, they are being challenged today by seemingly invincible forces. The materialistic ideas of consumerism, greed and satisfaction of sense desires have disguised themselves in the alluring garments of instant gratification and are beginning to captivate many people. Few can see beneath these attractive disguises to the frightful consequences they betoken — war, mental distress, the breaking up of families, loneliness, poverty, etc. This is why the powerful Vedanta lion with its weapons of Truth and Love has emerged at this time. With these weapons sharpened and refurbished by Swamiji's true and faithful interpretations, the Vedanta Lion is capturing the hearts and minds of people everywhere. 'And if God is with us, who can stand against us?'

But how does Vedanta really fight? It is not its way to change the political or economic set-up — that has frequently been tried and mostly with no or disastrous results. What is needed is that people should know the truth — the most essential truth of who they really are, because the basic ignorance of their true nature as the Self is the cause of all their misery — personal and social. If you start out with mistaken ideas, everything that follows will be a mistake. If you think you are nothing but the body-mind complex, you will never be able to live happily and sanely.

And it is only through spiritual disciplines that you can become aware of your own divine nature, the Self, and help others to also become aware of their divine nature. As more and more people become spiritually awakened, society will change for the better. Then, in the words of Swamiji:

> This indecent and brutal hurry which forces us to go ahead of every one else will ... vanish from the world. With it will vanish all struggle, with it will vanish all hate, with it will vanish all jealousy, and all evil will vanish away for ever.... This very earth will then become heaven, and ... that is the great utility of divine realization. Everything that you see in society will be changed and transfigured then.... The whole universe will thus be changed. This is the greatest gain to society.[23] ❐

22. *C.W.*, vol. 5, pp. 81–2.

23. *C.W.*, vol. 2, pp. 287–8.

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Śraddhā

SWAMI SATYAPRIYANANDA

This article is by the out-going Editor of Prabuddha Bharata.

Superstitions

Just as there is an evolution in the cosmos, even so there is an evolution in the human personality. The brute man is purely instinctive in his outlook. He does not hesitate to stamp a butterfly under his foot. To him, he is a body. The faith of some men is likewise of the lowest category and is often called 'blind faith'. The belief that it is auspicious to take a 'holy dip' during an eclipse, that the tying of a stone onto the branch of a certain tree, that certain spirits and ghosts can do the impossible, does not, to a major section of humanity deserve a second consideration or analysis. But many do believe in such external aids. However, this state of affairs does not last long. For, indeed, one soon realizes that the same causes do not always produce the same effect, and the desired result may be obtained by causes so far not within his limited vision. He begins to question, but out of fear of the unknown, he would rather cling to the good old superstition — blessed superstition! In spite of himself, however, he manifests as time goes on an urge to go beyond this faith in superstitions and following certain traditions blindly.

Scriptures and Guru

Every student of secular knowledge knows that he acquires his learning from books and from his teachers. The enquiring man too goes to the seat of knowledge, namely the Holy Scriptures and the venerable guides or gurus. Even as the student of secular knowledge either accepts unquestioningly what is written in the books and what is told by his teachers, or questions with sincerity of purpose, the man seeking to rise beyond superstitions, as a first step, accepts in toto the holy words contained in the scriptures and the teachings of the Guru. This constitutes a form of *Śraddhā*.[1]

Intellectual Faith

However, this itself may merely be a substituted superstition. Therefore, he subjects these words of counsel to the test of reason. Being an intellectual, he is happy when his belief is smashed by the hammer of reason, for, then he escapes yet another superstition. Says Swami Vivekananda:

> First hear, then reason and find out all that reason can give about the Atman; let the flood of reason flow over It, then take what remains. If nothing remains, thank God you have escaped a superstition. When you have determined that nothing *can* take away the Atman, that It stands every test, hold fast to this and teach it to all.[2]

The intellectual conviction that a thinking man derives from subjecting the truths revealed by the Scriptures and the Guru to reason, gives him a better foundation for faith. 'Acceptance by firm judgement as true of what the Scriptures and the Guru instruct, is called by sages *Śraddhā* or faith, by means of which the Reality is perceived.'[3] The need for faith to become intellectual is brought out in these words: 'A man must not only have faith, but intellectual faith too. To make a man

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1. *Sarvavedāntasiddhāntasārasaṅgraha* of Sankaracharya, ślokas, 210-17; *Vedāntasāra* of Sadananda, śloka, 24.
2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 7, p. 60. [Hereafter, CW.]
3. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, śloka, 25.

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take up everything and believe it, would be to make him a lunatic.'[4]

That we have taken up the teachings of the Scriptures and Guru for intellectual examination means we need to have some amount of faith in them and in their realizations. That we believe that these teaching can be examined by our reasoning capacity requires faith in our possessing this faculty. So, firstly, there must be faith in our capacity to examine the realizations of the sages and seers, and faith also in them and in their realizations. Says Swamiji:

> ...when a man has begun to hate himself, then the last blow has come. When a man has begun to be ashamed of his ancestors, the end has come. Here am I, one of the Hindu race, yet proud of my race, proud of my ancestors. I am proud to call myself a Hindu, I am proud that I am one of your unworthy servants. I am proud that I am a country-man of yours, you the descendants of the sages, you the descendants of the most glorious Rishis the world ever saw. Therefore, have faith in yourselves, be proud of your ancestors, instead of being ashamed of them.[5]

Coupled with this is the need for humility and submissiveness as well as a receptive mind which is always ready to be taught. The enquiry has to be made with sincerity of purpose, not just for showing erudition or as meaningless prattle.

Active Faith

Most people, in an abstracted sort of way, believe in the existence of God. But as to realizing God — few do anything about that. Why is that so? When one *has* faith, it is expected that one will *act* on that faith. So, after intellectual faith must come in a person the urge for action or exertion. Until then there is no belief in him. Says Swami Vivekananda,

> A great sage once told me that not one in twenty millions in this world believed in God. I asked him why, and he told me, 'Suppose there is a thief in this room, and he gets to know that there is a mass of gold in the next room, and only a very thin partition between the two rooms; what will be the condition of that thief?' I answered, 'He will not be able to sleep at all; his brain will be actively thinking of some means of getting at the gold, and he will think of nothing else.' Then he replied, 'Do you believe that a man could believe in God and not go mad to get Him? If a man sincerely believes that there is that immense, infinite mine of Bliss, and that It can be reached, would not that man go mad in his struggle to reach It?' Strong faith in God and the consequent eagerness to reach Him constitute *Śraddhā*.[6]

There are some pre-requisites for faith to become active. First and foremost is intellectual faith. That is the basis. Then comes:

a) *Faith in God.* Possessed of intellectual faith, one must next know that everyone is walking in the path of God and that too under His merciful guidance and protection. This requires a tremendous faith in God, born out of verification in our own lives that we are constantly receiving such guidance and protection. Nothing is impossible for God. This is illustrated by means of a story of two yogis[7], one of whom would not believe that God could make camels and elephants pass through the eye of a needle, while the other who believed in the omnipotence of God became recipient of His vision. Again there is the story of Kartikeya and Ganesha[8] in which the latter possessing the knowledge that in Parvati, their mother as well as an aspect of the Divine Mother, is contained the entire universe, became recipient of Her Grace. The omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent

4. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 244.
5. *CW*, vol. 3, p. 381.
6. *CW*, vol. 1, p. 407.
7. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1994), p. 124. [Hereafter, *Gospel*.]
8. *Gospel*, p. 376.

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God helps us in times of stress and strain.

b) *Faith in God's Name.* God is symbolized by His Holy Name. The Name and the Named are one. So one must have faith in the Holy Name of God. Says Sri Ramakrishna, 'I would repeat the Name of God and believe that a certain thing would happen, and it would invariably come to pass. But you must remember, unless one is guileless and broad-minded, one cannot have such a faith.'[9] Again the great Master tells of the depth of faith in Krishnakishore who, orthodox as he was, accepted the water given to him by a low-caste man purified by the repetition of the Holy Name of Shiva.[10] In his own homely language, Sri Ramakrishna would remark how Sri Ramachandra who was God Himself had to build a bridge to go to Lanka, while Hanuman, possessed of the faith in the Name of Rama, cleared the ocean in one jump: such is the power of faith in the Name of God. Through several other examples Sri Ramakrishna drives home the power of God's Name and the need to cultivate faith in it.

c) *Faith in Attainment.* If there is a God, one must find Him. It does not matter if a Buddha or a Christ realized God — He must be attained by us; that is the important thing. Further, if someone can realize God during the course of many lives, it must be possible for him to accelerate the process, it must be possible for him to realize God here and now. This is the faith that one must have, that we shall realize God here and now. We should possess that great determination which a Bhagavan Buddha or Sri Ramakrishna exhibited in their exemplary lives.

d) *Faith in Practice.* It is not how deeply we understand intellectually the scriptural truths that matters, not how ornamentally we can treat it, but a faith in the practice of the little we have understood. Patanjali holds that truth will make itself felt in spite of belief or disbelief in a God, provided one follows the practices of yoga. This stand is a boon to a vast section of mankind.

Firstly, there are those who do not understand abstract theories. Their heads simply reel. 'The vast majority of mankind must deal with things that are concrete. For the dull people cannot see all the highest philosophy. ...If you give them things in the abstract and infinite, they get lost. Give them things [to do], a little at a time. ...These are the kindergartens of religion.'[11]

Secondly, there are a class of people who possessed of intellect enough to probe into the mysteries of God and creation have found that they would rather not believe in a God which they are unable to see tangibly. For them is the life of Buddha which shows 'that even a man who does not believe in God, has no metaphysics, belongs to no sect, and does not go to any church, or temple, and is a confessed materialist, even he can attain to the highest. ...Perfection does not come from belief or faith. ...Perfection comes through the disinterested performance of action.'[12] Here the stess is on the 'disinterested performance of action'.

Thirdly, the varied views regarding creation and salvation raise a justifiable doubt in the mind of even a sincere man as to whom one ought to follow and why. If one is wrong, all others could be wrong as well. Until the conviction dawns within that these varied explanations are merely different readings by the human mind, that each is truth, one lower and the other higher, and the climax of it all is realization, this doubt is justified: 'In whom, moreover, are we to put our faith?'[13] So, as a rule, we ought to begin from where we are at present. Make a beginning, else you would not be even an inch away from where you are. And if one is earnest, someone or the other will show the right way.

For all these classes of people it is enough

9. *Gospel*, p. 234.
10. *Gospel*, p. 117.
11. *CW*, vol. 1, p. 512.
12. *CW*, vol. 4, pp. 136–7.
13. *CW*, vol. 6, p. 212.

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to undergo faithfully certain disciplines. But this faith must be there even for one who believes in God, because it is this faith that inclines one towards practice.

e) *Faith in ourselves.* All said and done, we come back to the centre, ourselves. Swami Vivekananda brings out this factor when he says, 'people say, "Do you believe in God? Do you believe in a future life? Do you believe in this doctrine or that dogma?" But here the base is wanting: this belief in oneself. Ay, the man who cannot believe in himself, how can they expect him to believe in anything else?'[14] Comparing the possibilities for superior achievement through faith in the spirit rather than faith in the muscles, Swamiji says,

> Whatever of material power you see manifested by the Western races is the outcome of this *Śraddhā*, because they believe in their muscles, and if you believe in your spirit, how much more will it work! Believe in that infinite soul, the infinite power, which, with consensus of opinion, your books and sages preach. That Atman which nothing can destroy, in It is infinite power only waiting to be called out. ...Be strong and have this *Śraddhā*, and everything else is bound to follow.[15]

This faith in ourselves as being the Atman is the basis of morality: '"We are the Atman, deathless and free; pure, pure by nature. Can we ever commit any sin? Impossible!" — such a faith is needed. Such a faith makes men of us, makes gods of us.'[16] He asks further, 'Do you believe that one who has such faith and pride as to feel, "I come of noble descent", can ever turn out to be bad? How could that be? That faith in himself would curb his actions and feelings, so much so that he would rather die than commit wrong.'[17]

Faith in ourselves is the secret of greatness. Faith in oneself gives the strength to face even death, like Nachiketa. Faith even leads to salvation. Faith in ourselves is therefore central to all pursuits.

The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practised, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished. Throughout the history of mankind, if any motive power has been more potent than another in the lives of all great men and women, it is that of faith in themselves. Born with the consciousness that they were to be great, they became great. ...Faith in ourselves will do everything. I have experienced it in my own life, and am still doing so; and as I grow older that faith is becoming stronger and stronger. He is an atheist who does not believe in himself. The old religion said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself. But it is not selfish faith, because the Vedanta, again, is the doctrine of oneness. It means faith in all, because you are all. Love for yourselves means love for all, love for animals, love for everything, for you are all one. It is the great faith which will make the world better. I am sure of that. ...Do you know how much energy, how many powers, how many forces are still lurking behind that frame of yours? What scientist has known all that is in man? Millions of years have passed since man first came here, and yet but one infinitesimal part of his powers has been manifested. Therefore, you must not say that you are weak. How do you know what possibilities lie behind that degradation on the surface? You know but little of that which is within you. For behind you is the ocean of infinite power and blessedness.[18]

14. *CW*, vol. 4, p. 123.
15. *CW*, vol. 3, pp. 319–20.
16. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 332.
17. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 365.
18. *CW*, vol. 2, pp. 301–02.

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Ripe Faith

Once Narendranath spoke of blind faith, attacking faith as a means to liberation. Sri Ramakrishna observed, 'Naren, what do you mean by "blind faith"? Faith is always blind. Has faith an "eye"? Why say "blind faith"? Either simply say "faith" or say "Jnana". What do you mean by classifying faith — one kind having an eye, and the other being blind?' By these words Sri Ramakrishna meant to convey that even the highest human knowledge, even all philosophy was 'blind faith', as compared with one atom of that realization which came from an actual perception of Reality.'[19] This is the man of real faith or *Śraddhā*, for he does not even flinch for a moment from the actual perception of Reality. His state is beautifully described by Swamiji:

> If you have seen a certain country, and a man forces you to say that you have not seen it, still in your heart of hearts you know you have. So, when you see religion and God in a more intense sense than you see this external world, nothing will be able to shake your belief. Then you have real faith. That is what is meant by the words in your Gospel, 'He who has faith even as a grain of mustard seed.' Then you will know the Truth because you have become the Truth.[20]

Superior Faith

So far we have seen the development of faith essentially to be personal effort with or without the belief in an all-merciful Providence. This may be likened to the struggle of a huge elephant (symbolizing personal effort) to cross the stormy ocean of *Saṁsāra* (transmigratory existence). Modern minds, the sad outcome of the education they receive, will doubt everything they hear, and therefore discuss, reason and examine to see if that be true or false. Thus so much energy is lost in arriving intellectually at the truth that nothing is left for action! Further, *Māyā* being powerful, it is meet that relying on personal effort, many a ship has sunk in the attempt to go beyond it.

We have a second category of rare and fortunate souls on whose foreheads are stamped unmistakably the word 'MINE'. Such persons feel no need for arguments, book-learning, or efforts motivated towards attaining certain goals; nor do they have any anxiety regarding the attainment of the goal. They are like 'the kitten that simply mews'; 'Mother' knows best where to place them, what practices to get done by them, and in what measure realizations are to be bestowed. They rejoice in God's glory, their faces gleam out of the fullness of interior joy and they speak with power and authority. 'Mother' supplies them their needs, lives in them, speaks through them, for, they are specially dear to Her. On such persons, *Māyā* loses its hold. They are as small fish that live in the ocean and are not frightened by the turbulent waves. Instances of all these forms of faith may be found in the lives of many great men. ❐

> Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith, faith in God—that is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now and again introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; that is what we need.
>
> We have lost faith in ourselves.... It is therefore that I preach this Advaita....
>
> —*Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 65

19. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1974), p. 106.
20. *CW*, vol. 2, p. 165.

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Vedanta *after* Ramakrishna-Vivekananda

DR. M. SIVARAMKRISHNA

Is today's Vedanta just the same as it was before the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda? This is the question which Dr. M. Sivaramkrishna addresses in this article. Vedanta has been accepted by some without much of a judgement and by others to various degrees after careful scrutiny. Through those who have been influenced by Vedantic thoughts, others have been influenced also. So it is necessary to evaluate the contribution the Holy Trio made to the progress of Vedantic thought.

To think of Vedanta after Ramakrishna-Vivekananda is to realize two things: in one sense it refers to time; in another it denotes models influenced by the twins. For, Vedanta is no longer the same *after* the intervention of these two. The past tense is now the present continuous in the grammar of spirituality. Retaining the core, a new idiom is forged.

This Vedanta has gone through the phases of admiration, through close scrutiny to thoughtful (though selective, indirect) absorption. From being a fascinating curio it has become archetypal spirituality. It is the magic of the ordinary, the key to marry the elemental to the transcendental.

The prototype of this phenomenon is evident in the *guru-shishya* themselves. Unaware of the emerging models of science, etc., Ramakrishna linked his own inclusive experiential transcendence to them. 'I see God as I see you,' he declared and the seeing he identified is a harbinger of the radicalism we experience today in our inclusiveness, complementarity, plurality and even destabilizing the centre-margin split. The split is a hyphen now and not a binary.

A chronological event is now poised to be a logical transformation. The three revolutions — the cognitive, the comparative and the communicative — seem to be the exemplifications of Ramakrishna-Vedanta. In this sense, we have the romantics of popular, new versions of reality (from Eddington through Schrödinger to Capra and beyond). We also have second order classicists revising their visions without of course directly referring to Ramakrishna-Vedanta. Even the considerable work on the nature of language in various disciplines and the world constructed thereby seem to approximate to several motifs found in the crucial summation by Swamiji, specially his insights into *maya*.

There are those who are directly and non-judgementally exposed to it either through the Vedanta centres or some *guru* or the other. But the other, more important group shares these ideas as a part of the very ethos affected by the first group which obviously wields considerable influence on the second. Thus, an Aldous Huxley, a Toynbee, an Alport, or a Joseph Campbell (not to mention Jung and others) with direct exposure to and some practical awareness of Ramakrishna-Vedanta would, in turn, affect several others. Those influenced like this may themselves be on the margins of this phenomenon and yet they are central to the changing scenarios.

This is, in a sense, Ramakrishna-Vedanta *apaurusheya:* 'Like the gentle dew,' this drops unseen and unheard 'but brings into blossom the fairest of' a variety of roses — themselves unaware of the unseen nourishment. If a Fred Alan Wolf cites Vivekananda on Jnana Yoga as an initial general 'snippet' for his 'blow up,' one is surprised and pleased.[1] When Vivek-

1. Fred Alan Wolf, *The Spiritual Universe* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 283.

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ananda declared that by 'Vedas no texts are meant', he could as well have said 'by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta no persons are meant'. This is the most remarkable feature of Vedanta towards the end of the century: it is an unopened gift, yes, in a sense, but in another, more vital sense, there is no need to open it for it *was never closed* or shut!

II

That it could blossom behind all allegedly closed curtains and surface in unexpected quarters is borne out by recent history. There is manifold awareness in former religion-as-opium blocks of, ironically, this non-toxic opium gently spreading its freedom-conferring fragrance. Surprisingly, like M. the recorder coming back for another dose of the Master's intoxicating pinch, the ideologues wedded to social transformation seem to need recurrent doses. For, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta after all made the old equation an explosive half-truth displacing it by the new: socialism without spirituality is fatally toxic; spirituality without social base —just and equitable — is not even an opium it is alleged to be! It could, even heretically, be opium with all its punch drained.

Vedanta after Ramakrishna-Vivekananda has in this sense vitalized our awareness of limits to texts (to *Smritis*, if you like). No sacredness inheres in any text, either scriptural or merely normative, revelatory or rational. For, actuality overrides textuality (to use the categories of Gregory Schopen[2]) and actuality, if submerged or marginalised, has an irony of its own. The irony is to forge radicalism as the only alternative. To use Ramakrishna-Vivekananda idiom, muscles of iron and nerves of steel not tempered by awareness of iron in the soul (not the Sartrean iron!) would be ignited with an uncontrollable urge for smashing things. The two world wars and the very idiom of violence make this threat real but reality is ever a challenge to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta's resilience. Its resilience is seen already in its quietly transforming character. In short, Vedanta after Ramakrishna-Vivekananda *is* an open text as a process but a closed one in its productive result — the awareness of the perfection already in us.

Too close to this phenomenon, one may be conscious of only the facade. The explosion of *gurus*, the popularity (and often the banality) of meditation traditions and techniques, the accelerated search for even drug-induced states of altered consciousness allied with the do-it-now books are excesses of what is certainly a quiet, steady awareness for alternative life-styles. That they are maladies of an affluent ethos — either achieved or aspired for — is true; but what is not immediately evident is the unheard melody imbedded in these very maladies. To put it bluntly 'a quick fix' is a symptom of the need for an Atman-Brahman equation which is neither a fix nor a flux. Vedanta after Ramakrishna-Vivekananda cognizes the hunger but offers food that is wholesome. Without hunger of this evident nature not even Atman-menu is edible. Hunger exists, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta offers food.... The pretext is hunger, the actuality is Ramakrishna-Vedanta.

The Buddhist exhortation comes to mind: 'Hinder not yourselves, Ananda, by honouring the remains of the Tathagata. Be jealous, I beseech you, Ananda, in your own behalf! Devote yourselves to your own good! Be earnest, be zealous, be intent on your own good.'

III

Ignorance is always asymmetric, the East-West divide, if one is fond of the idiom. But knowledge is ever an equaliser and spirituality is an activator of a totalizing kind. Vedanta after Ramakrishna-Vivekananda is global, undermining asymmetric ignorance and contending faiths. That the impact is in the field of spirituality is exactly how it

2. Gregory Schopen, *Bones, Stones and Buddhist Monks* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), pp. 7–9.

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should happen. For, even increasing academic habitation of Vedanta is a pointer to the global implications not of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta alone but of wisdom traditions of all kinds. One may (the pious monastic, for instance,) sneer at academia's woeful ignorance of the need for piety and sanctity in the study; but that they are evaluating the phenomenon in nearly a comprehensive way, is a welcome antithesis (we discarded false syntheses of foundational narratives of late!). Vedanta offers no frozen models; it vibrates endless equations of faith — a constant deferral without an endless, inane relativism. The cliche of privileges (either disciplinary or denominational) is seen to be what it is: a cliche.

But the genteel romanticism of neo-Vedanta jumps to spectacular scenarios from such evidence. This is neither actual nor needed. The world of *maya* has its own momentum: in spite of criminal awareness, affluence itself feeds on indigence; violence fosters and fattens itself on the apparently helpless. Programmes for development end up in promotion of (if one prefers) neo-colonialism. Above all, hegemonies of the privileged even while fighting for justice from a vantage point end up in more hegemony (not excepting even the lay/monk divisive hegemony!).

Vedanta of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda has no knowledge of instant remedies for such paradoxes. For, its cognitive models are unblinkingly bifocal: both *nitya* and *lila*, the temporal/participatory as well as the playful/enacting go together to constitute the very substance of Shakti, the Divine Mother's play. For the conscious *actor* it is play; for the participant it is real. It is generative in its primal energies which could be destructive if the needed orientations go unheeded. Hence the absence of anxiety, for everything that the Great Mother does is pre- and — what is vital — well-determined. She hurts and heals, for, (as modern medicine is *real*-izing) 'pain is inevitable, suffering is optional'[3]. In short, the Master's Mother heals rather than cures. The shift in perceiving this does not prevent efforts for curing, it only proscribes the equating of curing with well-being.

If is here that one has to hyphenate Master and Swamiji with the Mother. She is the centrality without whose presence the other two (even if it sounds unorthodox to say it) would remain powerless. The radicalism of the Mother is least seen but most felt. We are yet to probe the mysterious efflorescence of the Mother — specially through her pioneering 'western' daughters. The 'unanimously anonymous' Mother is the gentle dew that falls everywhere. Whether radical or revised, feminist ideology finds the *nitya–maya* syndrome exemplified in her extremely exasperating. Wholly rural in upbringing, totally subservient to her Lord and Master, she yet nursed the seeds of wisdom without needing any labels of time or space. This is wisdom so inescapable that the great pioneer, Swamiji himself, needed her strength and benedictory powers.

Denuded of denomination she is the Mother that impels father and son to disseminate the power behind the actuality of their spirituality. Vedanta after her is feminine without being effeminate; manly without being mannish. Even the subaltern feminists can (and some of them do) find her intriguing (to find someone intriguing initially, is only to be inspired eventually). She is, above all, a miracle of successful management; without ostensible qualification, she managed to emerge as a pervasive paradigm for the irrepressible (and often corrigible) energies of women. Sound psychology stemming from steady insight into lived life — this is Vedanta after her.

IV

The conclusion is not easy to formulate since it concerns the Indian as also the Third World situations. These are in a feverish flux and seem to go the Western way: Creation of an electronic affluent society in the name of economic and social justice to the notoriously marginalised. This is an implicit formidable

3. Words of 'Sri Ram' to the author.

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challenge to Vedanta. For the emerging ethos Swamiji is an ideal icon, like the monks who follow him. Urbane, articulate, impeccable in public relations that matter, the monk as a successful manager has an irresistible appeal. The *gerua* has its inherent charisma. But it seems to me an unconscious by-passing of Ramakrishna.

We have precedents in the Marxists. To see Ramakrishna's spirituality as displaced bourgeoise anxiety (just as his *Tantra* is seen by psychiatrists as Mother-fixation) is to marginalise him. It appears a harmless reading since Swamiji's social dialectic is acceptable. Another *avatara* of this is the Subaltern.[4] The Master here is essentially a palliative for the anxieties of the rising middle class in colonial Bengal reeling under the Sahib boot (and what is more, colonial Bengal is assumed to be the whole of India, just as the Western is equated with the universal). Ramakrishna becomes a promising subject for the New Historian lovingly placed on his desk but drained of what made him Ramakrishna.

'Let a thousand Vedantas bloom!' the relativist may gleefully cry. But Vedanta never splits relativism as an absolute. It believes in deferral but not in perverse abolition of centres. It is in fact Ramakrishna who offers an exacting paradigm. Kali's child, the Mother is central to him, but without the anxiety to make *his* centre the centre for all. It is good to remember that Swamiji would have been a brilliant Bengali intellectual without the 'illiterate' priest of Dakshineswar. It is tempting to ignore this and that is what is fatal to Vedanta *after* Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. ❐

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4. *See* Sumit Sarkar, 'The Kathamrita as a Text: Towards an Understanding of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa,' *Occasional Papers on History and Society 12* (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1985). *See also* 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and Bhakti: Ramakrishna and His Times,' *Writing Social History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 282–357. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), specially chapter three, pp. 35–75. A recent assessment is by Indira Chaudhury, *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), specially 'Spiritual Masculinity and Swami Vivekananda,' pp. 120–49. But far more interesting is *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism*, Proceedings of the Workshop held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1993 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), ed. William Radice; though uneven, some articles merit serious scrutiny: 'Swami Vivekananda and Seva: Taking "Social Service" Seriously,' by Gwilym Beckerlegge and 'Vivekananda and Essentialism,' by Glyn Richards. Finally, a balanced but inadequate response to Swamiji is T.N. Madan's *Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 189–95.

He who is the cause of all and who enables all things to function according to their nature; who brings to maturity all that can be ripened; who, being non-dual, rules over the whole universe and engages the gunas in their respective functions—He is concealed in the Upanishads, the secret part of the Vedas. Brahma knew him who can be known only from the evidence of the Vedas. The gods and seers of olden times who knew Him became Brahman and attained Immortality.

—*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, V. 5-6

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Science and Vedanta

DR. RAMAKRISHNA RAO VETURY

The Upanishadic insight 'Tat tvam asi — *That thou art', it is well known today, has caught the attention of scientists all over the world. The learned author traces how this impact came about on Schrodinger, the Nobel Prize winner for Theoretical Physics in 1933. A search for unification was in the air at that time with Einstein trying to derive during his last days, one force out of which all the four types of forces could be explained. This unification was achieved to some extent and it was hoped that complete unification was a definite possibility. Schrodinger, being a philosopher, strove to extend this idea of unification to* certain *fields of human experience and came up with the following sets of unification: (1) Behaviour and physique are one, (2) subject and object are one, (3) all mind is one, and, (4) consciousness is one. From this it was just one step to be captivated by the doctrine of identity* — Tat tvam asi — *when he came across this Upanishadic insight.*

The author points out some of the views of Schrodinger on unification: (a) that this unity is to be experienced — not just to be studied and believed, (b) that this life of yours which you are living is not merely a piece of the entire existence, but it is in a certain sense the whole; only this whole is not so constituted that it can be surveyed in a single glance, (c) that the world — meaning universal consciousness — and consciousness — that is, individual consciousness — are one and the same thing, insofar as both are constituted by the same elements (Atman=Brahman).

In recent times, science has been moving closer to the Advaita Vedantic world-view. The interpretation of the Upanishadic insight of '*Tat tvam asi*, That thou art', as the doctrine of the identity of Atman and Brahman, has had a special appeal to the philosophically oriented scientists of this century. Schrodinger and Oppenheimer are two such leading western scientists. Of these, Schrodinger wrote two books: (1) *My View of the World*[1] and (2) *Mind and Matter*[2], bringing out his philosophy which is based on the above doctrine of identity. It will be our endeavour to understand how this Nobel Prize winner (1933, for Theoretical Physics) came to admire the Upanishadic insight *(Tat tvam asi)* and why he advised 'a bit of blood transfusion from Eastern thought into the Western thought, with caution'.[3]

Schrodinger (1887-1961) was a theoretical physicist from Vienna. In 1921 he was a professor in the University of Zurich, from where he published his wave-equation and propounded his theory of wave-mechanics, which won him the Nobel Prize. This theory is described as 'something like a spiritual throb that cómes as near as possible to our concept of pure thought'.[4] He was also well-versed in philosophy — both western and eastern — and at one stage, he thought of choosing philosophy for his career. He studied the Upanishads, Bhagavadgita, Sankhya and Buddhist thought (in translation) and his writings show a critical appreciation of some

1. Erwin Schrodinger, *My View of the World* (Cambridge: University Press, 1964).
2. Erwin Schrodinger, *Mind and Matter*(Cambridge: University Press, 1958).
3. *Mind and Matter*, p. 55.
4. Erwin Schrodinger, *Science and Human Temperament* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1935), pp. 19-20.

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of the doctrines of Indian philosophy. It is this scientist-philosopher who advocated borrowing from Eastern thought to Western thought, which, though surprising in view of the developments that have occurred in the twentieth century Western science compared with the nineteenth century achievements, can be traced to the scientific insight obtained in this century.

Cartesian Dualism and Objective Science

In an earlier paper[5] the present author has shown how Descartes exerted a powerful influence on the growth of science in the West by (1) his rationalism, (2) his doctrine of extreme dualism between mind and matter, and (3) the study of the real world by excluding the mind from it. This gave rise to ideas of objective science and epistemological movements like scientism which stated that the only reliable knowledge is that obtained from scientific observation. The enormous success in science and technology achieved in the West in the nineteenth century justified this belief and led to the optimism that nothing will be uncertain or impossible for science (Laplace). The flood of tangible objects in the world has offered vast scope for understanding them objectively and to utilize them fully for the benefit of humanity.

The twentieth century science has made a significant departure. The developments in fields like quantum mechanics, relativity and other subjects have shaken the earlier beliefs. The Laplacian certainties gave way to Heisenberg's uncertainties. Determinism had to yield to probability. The subject-object interaction had to be admitted and scientific attitude had to be recast. Cartesian dualism had to be discarded. Mind had to be integrated to the world picture. However, western science and philosophy have been found inadequate for this task.[6]

Unification Efforts

It is in this scenario that we have to understand the unification postulates in science attempted during the second half of this century. Science offered four types of forces in this universe. Realization followed that multiplicity is only apparent and that these four forces could be integrated finally into one. Einstein himself was known to have spent his last years in search of such a unification between gravitation and other forces. There has been a partial success so far in reducing this number from four by this unification, and the conviction is deep that ultimately all these forces can be reduced to one single force, which accounts for every force in the universe. When this happens (as is sure to) we may have to say, borrowing the Vedantic vocabulary, that (1) multiplicity is only an illusion *(Māyā)*; (2) it is the result of inadequate knowledge *(Avidyā)*; and (3) there is only one that is real and all the rest are identical with it. This search for the one accounting for all — the apparent multiplicity — is akin to the search for the transcendental truth in the Upanishads.

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Schrodinger's Method

It is by such a unification of multiple phenomena Schrodinger arrived at the doctrine of identity. As a philosopher in his own right, Schrodinger proceeded to establish the oneness of multiple appearances in *certain* areas of human experience.

First he took up the scientific theory of evolution and developed a theory that corrects the well-known defects in the theories of Lamarck[7] and Darwin[8]. All species of life-

5. Ramakrishna Rao Vetury, *Prabuddha Bharata*, Vol. 103, Feb. 1998, pp. 212-14; Apr. 1998, pp. 286-89; May 1998, pp. 351-54.

6. Ramakrishna Rao Vetury, *Philosophical Foundations of Homeopathy* (to be published.) Homeopathy is the only branch of western science that clearly asserted that mind and mental reactions are the root-cause of ill-health of the body, and totally rejected the Cartesian dualism in its heydays.

7. Ramakrishna Rao Vetury, *Upanishads and*

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forms live in a habitat that provides them adequate food and shelter and a balanced protection from foes: food chains like mouse-cat-dog (*Jīvo jīvasya jīvanam*[9]). Such a habitat can be called the environment. The species are driven by the will to live — survival — though the individual is sure to die sometime. The species survive through (1) the technique of reproduction, (2) suitable evolution to cope up with any harmful environmental changes like reduction in food supply or increase in foes, and (3) migration. Of these we shall consider only evolution as a means of better chances for survival in an unfavourable environment.

The Lamarckian theory has been proved wrong by the experimental observation that acquired properties cannot be inherited. This is easily illustrated by many examples from various societies. For example, in olden times, Chinese women with very small feet were considered to be beautiful, leading to the practice of bandaging the girl-child's feet so that they remain small and cute when the baby grows up. This has been practised for generations until recently. But Chinese girls were never *born* with tiny feet; every time the baby had to undergo the torture of bandages. This shows that the acquired character of small feet of the Chinese mother was never inherited by her off-spring.

Coming to Darwin, his theory states that when an environment changes unfavourably, some changes (mutations) will take place in the genetic material leading to some changes in the organism to enable the organism to cope up with the external threats. These mutations, Darwin held, occur entirely by chance. Also, some of these changes can be useless or even prove fatal, and only a few can be of real help. Schrodinger objects to leaving everything to chance without any role for the individual. He agrees that in response to a threat some mutations occur by chance to start with. The resulting change in the trait is simultaneously tried out by the organism and accepted or rejected on the basis of benefit to itself. This is the process of natural selection of the useful mutation by trial and error which has to take place *simultaneously* with the mutations. Once a useful change is picked up further mutations occur only in that direction to strengthen that trait, and chance thereafter has no role. The individual perfects the trait by the simultaneous usage of the organ (trait) and this becomes the inherited property of the future generations. Thus, modifying Darwin's theory, Schrodinger concludes that behaviour (using the modified traits) and physique (the body undergoing mutations) are *one* and not separate. So, *behaviour and physique are one.*[10]

Mind and Consciousness

Consciousness of the environment is a mental phenomenon and we now know that, in man, the brain and the nervous system are the specific organs of the mind responsible for this awareness. It is well-established that the brain and the nervous system of higher animals like man are a much later development in the time scale of evolution. But mind and consciousness are essential for any species of organisms to understand the environment and the changes therein, if it is to survive the change by suitable evolution. So mind and consciousness must have been there in all forms of life including plants, as a survival requirement. 'We cannot but attribute some kind of consciousness, however dim and undifferentiated, to our primitive little cousin, *Hydrafusca*, on the ladder of life.'[11] (*Hydrafusca* is the little water polyp, a low-level

Modern Thought (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1986), pp. 36-41. For Theory of Evolution.

8. Ramakrishna Rao Vetury, *Selected Doctrines from Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1987), pp. 40-95. For Theory of Evolution.
9. *Mahabharata*, Santiparva, 110. Arjuna says this to Yudhishthira.
10. *Mind and Matter*, p. 30.
11. *My View of the World*, p. 31.

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organism.) 'Consciousness is that by which the world becomes manifest; by which indeed it becomes present.'[12] So consciousness and mind have been co-existent with the universe since its inception. J.B.S. Haldane writes: 'We do not find obvious evidence of life or mind in so-called inert matter, and naturally study them more easily where they are most completely manifested, but if the scientific point of view is correct, we shall ultimately find them, at least in rudimentary forms, all through the universe.'[13]

So, mind and consciousness are universally spread out from time immemorial. Consciousness is associated with learning process and reaction to new situations. This response to a challenge is a conscious effort while the habits acquired by repeated performance (like breathing) pass into unconscious. So, consciousness does influence evolution in broader terms. Consciousness being a universal phenomenon is treated only as singular. *There cannot be plurality in consciousness.*

Similarly, the mind. Mind is universal. While being there in every living organism, it appears as multiple when we are influenced by the Cartesian dualism between mind and matter. Under the same influence, we have grown up with the view that the understanding mind (called the subject) separates from the rest of the material world (called the object) and sits on a separate pedestal to study the rest of the world in an objective manner. This method led to much progress in science but it left a gap in the world picture. The world picture is devoid of mind while mind is, in reality, all-pervasive in the universe. Both physics and physiology of this century disagree with this mindless world picture. Sherrington, a famous biologist, points out that any animal (man, for instance) is made of millions of cells, each of which is a self-sufficient life-unit, undergoing changes like birth, growth and decay. So each cell is complete with mind but still we cannot say that man's mind is the sum total of the sub-minds of the cells. Similarly, the minds of different individuals living in this world give the same world picture. How is this to be explained? Schrodinger considers it an arithmetical paradox that cannot be explained by normal experience. He clearly states: 'The applicability of arithmetic to these things becomes extremely dubious.'[14] The very idea of sub-minds as well as plural mind is a monstrosity[15], unacceptable to philosophy as well as to science.

So there is only one way out of the situation: that is to find a place for mind in the world. This means that the *subject and object are one. The mind and its construct are one.* It is because of this we cannot find a *separate* place for mind in the world picture.

We are generally accustomed to locate the mind within the body of an individual. This is because all mental activity like thought, desire, etc. start from within and can be hidden from public gaze. Some people talk of inner voice guiding their actions. A murderer can plan a murder without a second person knowing it. So, it is a convenience to think of mind as something internal. (The brain is certainly within the skull.) Physical action is witnessed by all. But when we say that mind is all-pervasive, we should learn to look upon mind as something like ether, all-pervasive outside and inside of the body. Then we can get rid of the limitations of our vision.

To sum up: Schrodinger arrived at the following unifications.

(1) Behaviour and physique are one.
(2) Subject and object are one.
(3) All mind is one.
(4) Consciousness is one.

Tat Tvam Asi

Having arrived at the above identities, it

12. Ibid., p. 40.
13. J.B.S. Haldane, *Essay on Science and Ethics*, 'Inequality of Man', (Chatto, 1932), p. 113.
14. *My View of the World*, p. 29.
15. *Mind and Matter*, p. 62.

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was just one step for Schrodinger to be captivated by the doctrine of identity — *Tat tvam asi* — when he came across this Upanishadic insight. In fact, he goes further and says that this unity is to be experienced — not just to be studied and believed. It is a transcendental experience as the Upanishads say. He writes 'Hence this life of yours which you are living is not merely a piece of the entire existence, but it is in a certain sense the whole; only this whole is not so constituted that it can be surveyed in a single glance. (This is the meaning of *Tat tvam asi*.)'[16] He asserts further the identity of the individual consciousness (Atman) with the universal consciousness in the following words: 'The world and consciousness are one and the same thing, in so far as both are constituted by the same elements.'[17] For Schrodinger it is complete Advaita, pure and simple.

Why Caution?

Schrodinger advises caution in borrowing from eastern thought into the western outlook. He explains: 'Blood transfusion needs precaution to prevent clotting. We do not wish to loose the logical precision that our scientific thought has reached, and that is unparalleled anywhere at any epoch.'[18] We might as well agree with this view. After all, eastern civilizations came to a dead-end at one stage and these societies have been overrun by the western societies with their science and technology. This domination still continues and the East is very far behind the West in every intellectual activity. So in spite of his enthusiasm for eastern thought, Schrodinger is not carried away like Schopenhauer, but advises caution.

Schrodinger was a believer in metaphysics — specially with reference to 'the unquestioning acceptance of more than physical — that is transcendental — significance.'[19] He did not agree with the final conclusion of western wisdom that all transcendence has got to go. In the field of knowledge 'we cannot do without metaphysical guidance.'[20] He asserted: 'A real elimination of metaphysics means taking the soul out of both art and science, turning them into skeletons incapable of any future development.'[21] He talks in exuberant praise of Aldous Huxley's book, *The Perennial Philosophy*, an anthology from the mystics from various countries, races and times. He even admits that at one stage he is talking religion, not science — 'a religion, however, not opposed to science, but supported by what disinterested scientific research has brought to the fore.'[22] He is quite ready to accept the Upanishadic conclusion that 'the plurality that we perceive is only in appearance, it is not real'[23], along with the analogy of a diamond producing multiple images of a single source. For him analogy is a valid epistemological device when we find 'in a considerable number of cases logical thinking brings us upto a certain point and then leaves us in the lurch.'[24]

With such philosophical convictions and rigorous scientific background, Schrodinger is singularly free from all dogmas or isms and his admiration for the doctrine of identity is firmly rooted in the modern scientific spirit.❐

16. *My View of the World*, pp. 21-22.
17. Ibid., p. 37.
18. *Mind and Matter*, p. 55.
19. *My View of the World*, p. 3.
20. Ibid., p. 7.
21. Ibid., p. 4.
22. *Mind and Matter*, p. 62.
23. *My View of the World*, p. 18.
24. Ibid., p. 19.

The Background, the Reality, of everyone is that same Eternal, Ever Pure, and Ever Perfect One.

—*Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 1

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A Call to Greatness

MS. ANN MYREN

Religion has time and again been presented as the solution to the crises in which we find ourselves. But then, religion itself has been the cause of wars too. The learned author presents two findings in Sri Ramakrishna in the sphere of spiritual striving: (1) the harmony of religions and the efficiency of every religious path, and (2) that God manifests Himself more in man than in any other being or thing. And the method is Karma Yoga. The idea that the entire universe, men and women in particular, is but a manifestation of God — less or more transparent—, gives unlimited scope to serve such a God through all our actions. Truly, there need not be any distinction between the secular and the sacred, and every action performed in this spirit is as effective as elaborate rituals. And if one does not believe in a God, then too, the performance of disinterested action is an effective way for attaining perfection.

This issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* calls to our attention the centenary of the founding of Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati by Swami Vivekananda. One of the reasons Swamiji established an Ashrama in the mountains was to bring the devotees from the East and West together to exchange ideas and enrich their respective cultures with new knowledge. The exchange often takes place in the pages of *Prabuddha Bharata,* nonetheless Swamiji's original purpose of a continuing dialogue between the East and West for the benefit of the world thrives.

Recently a friend sent me an article by Vaclav Havel, poet and former President of Czechoslovakia, entitled 'Faith in the World'. In this article Mr. Havel tackles this question: why are the world's nations failing in their efforts to solve the crucial problems of this century — the environmental and social crises, and the uncontrolled production of weapons of mass destruction? He recognizes that nations have developed programmes to solve some aspects of these problems, but in his judgement they are 'technical tricks that have no real effect on the substance of the matter'.[1] And finally, Mr. Havel finds the moral world in total disarray if not decay; he deplores the 'loss of God'; the 'crisis of respect for the moral order extended to us from above', the lack of respect for any kind of authority, the atheism of the present era, the tension among various religions and 'the crisis of accountability and responsibility'. 'What indeed,' Mr. Havel asks, 'could change the tendencies of today's civilization? What could really halt the perpetual motion which we have not been able to control so far? He answers:

> It is my deep conviction that the only option is a change in the sphere of the spirit, in the sphere of human conscience, in the actual attitude of man towards the world. It is not enough to invent new machines, new regulations, or new institutions. We must understand differently and more perfectly the true purpose of our existence on this earth. Only such understanding will allow the development of new models of behavior, new scales of values and life objectives.[2]

Mr. Havel appears to be in search of a new age, new truths, a new vision of human-

1. Vaclav Havel, 'Faith in the World,' *Civilization* (April–May 1998), p. 52. [Hereafter, *Civilization.*]

2. *Civilization,* p. 52.

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ity, and perhaps the restoration of his faith in man. He asks whether or not this vital change can be brought about by wise people, or 'would we need, as in the past, charismatic prophets or modern messiahs, or even some kind of historical miracle?'[3] This is neither the time nor the place to make claims for prophets or messiahs, but it is fitting to consider a different vision of humanity, and to weigh the words and measure the truths of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and his apostle, Swami Vivekananda, that is, Swamiji.

Although Ramakrishna lived and died in the nineteenth century, as did Swamiji, his understanding of the world's religions was distinctly modern; even now, more than a hundred years later, it still belongs to the future. Using an experiential method to fathom the depths of many religions, he practised the disciplines of Christianity, Islam, Advaita Vedanta, and various theistic sects of Hinduism. His experiments yielded this discovery:

> God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof. You can reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by a rope. You can also climb up by a bamboo pole.[4]

In order to lower the hostility among members of various religions, Mr. Havel has suggested that people come together to search out the commonalities among the different religions. If the principle that all religions are true were accepted by the participants, perhaps something useful would evolve.

A second principle that Ramakrishna derived from his spiritual practice tells us where we can find God:

> [F]ire as an element, is present more in wood than in any other object. If you seek God, then seek Him in man; He manifests Himself more in man than in any other thing.[5]

We seem to have two different locations for God. Mr. Havel refers to God as existing 'above,' whereas Ramakrishna finds God right at hand, in his fellow human beings. We recognize that Mr. Havel's reference to the location of God is purely metaphorical, yet the language does indicate something, perhaps a feeling for the remoteness of God.

Next, let us see what Ramakrishna learned from his worship of Shiva:

> One day, while worshipping Śiva, I was about to offer a bel-leaf on the head of the image, when it was revealed to me that this Virāt, this Universe, itself is Śiva. After that my worship of Śiva through the image came to an end.[6]

Clearly, Ramakrishna's experience of Shiva tells us that the universe is God Himself, and we must add — God Herself:

> The Divine Mother revealed to me [Ramakrishna] in the Kāli temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The Image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness — all was Consciousness.
>
> I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss — the Bliss of Satchidānanda [Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute]. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kāli temple; but in him also I saw the Power of the Divine Mother vibrating.[7]

For Sri Ramakrishna the world was God Herself or Himself; this same God was in men, women, children, in the good and the bad. We see from Sri Ramakrishna's experi-

3. *Civilization*, p. 53.
4. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York), p. 111. [Hereafter, *Gospel.*]
5. *Gospel*, p. 726.
6. *Gospel*, p. 396.
7. *Gospel*, pp. 345–6.

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ences that we are living in God; we need only to open our eyes.

So far with regard to Mr. Havel's article, we have been setting the stage, examining possibilities, and clarifying the way God is tied to men and women, which is one reason why we turned to Ramakrishna's spiritual experiences. It seems to us in order to make the major change Mr. Havel suggests, the 'conscience' of humanity will have to get involved with God. What the human 'conscience' needs is a good soak in the Bliss of Satchidananda, and if one considers the fact that every person is divine, the possibility for just that is excellent.

A second reason for examining Ramakrishna's spiritual experiences is that they were one source of Swami Vivekananda's spiritual knowledge. The other source was his own spiritual experience, which leads us to this point: there are two very important fundamentals to remember when one studies Swamiji. First, everyone, absolutely everyone, is divine. The second fundamental is that the natural, inborn urge of humankind is to move toward God. Both good and bad move toward God as a result of their actions.[8] We are all going toward God whether we are conscious of it or not. It may take those who commit evil deeds longer, by virtue of a circuitous route, but they are still going toward God. It would, however, help to have a guidebook for the journey and just such a thing exists — Swamiji's *Karma Yoga*, which he thought his greatest work.

Let us go to Swamiji's *Karma Yoga* through Swami Ashokananda's interpretation which can be found in the lecture entitled, 'Meditate While You Work,' given in San Francisco in the 1950s[9]. In this lecture Swami Ashokananda pointed out that 'The major movement of the human mind in this age is towards the upliftment and glorification of mankind.' The Swami emphasized Karma Yoga, which compliments the tendency of the human mind in this new age.[10] The Hindu concept of man, the Swami said, is not separate from God, but still the 'preoccupation of this age is Man — not God.'[11] He pointed out that Swamiji was the soul of this age, and that Swamiji had said again and again, 'This is the age of the worship of the *Virat*, the visible God.'[12] These three elements — the age of Man, Karma Yoga, and the worship of the *Virat* — are naturally interwoven, and may be thought of as forming the philosophical background for spiritual life in this age.

We can easily see what Swami Ashokananda meant by saying that this is the age of Man. At what other time in history have so many people been actively involved in helping other people in so many different ways: famine relief, disaster relief, relief from illness and epidemics, the list goes on and on. Everyone wants and needs knowledge; education is spreading far and wide. We think that in the West the increase in self-help literature and in new age religions and its literature are manifestations of interest in the theme of humanity's perfectibility. (It's an old theme in the West.) The types of perfectibility that emerge are not so important as the fact that people are seeking some kind of perfection. Just as Swamiji has said, we are all going toward the Divine, the Real. Even scientists are looking at religion with new curiosity.

If humankind is to have a role in rejuvenating civilization's sagging spirituality, we must have spiritual practices suitable for the full range of humanity — practices that can be done on the job, in the subway, in the supermarket, in the field, in the office — anywhere, anytime, in any culture — practices that are pragmatic and free from symbology specific

8. *Bhagavad Gita*, ch. 4, sl. 11.
9. Swami Ashokananda, *Meditation, Ecstasy, and Illumination* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1990), pp. 103–32. [Hereafter, *Meditation*.]
10. *Meditation*, pp. 114–15.
11. *Meditation*, p. 114.
12. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991), vol. 3, p. 301. [Hereafter, *C.W.*]

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to any nation, culture, or religion. Where are the metaphysics for this philosophy? Never fear, India abounds in metaphysics.

Swami Vivekananda was referred to as the soul of this new age possibly because of his mastery of spiritual ends and means. We think, however, his greatness lay in his boundless love for humankind, and that is why Swami Ashokananda said he was the soul of this age, the age of Man. Swamiji saw us as we really are — pure divinity. He lived, moved and breathed in that consciousness. When he tells us to worship the *Virat*, the Vast One, the visible God — humankind — he knows of what he speaks.

Swamiji thought that his greatest work was his book *Karma Yoga*. Swami Ashokananda felt that *Karma Yoga* was filled with inspired words in the literal sense, and meaning is the thing, not style. Probably many of us think that we understand karma yoga quite well. Really there is not much to it, is there? Do a little work, and offer the fruit of it to the Lord, or ground oneself in a meditative mood and work, or call up the mood of detachment and hope for the best. Do we really take it seriously? According to Swami Ashokananda, Swamiji gave an interpretation of this yoga which is different from the traditional approach of the *Gita*. He wanted everyone to think of himself or herself as divine, as Spirit, as Brahman. Of course, this idea is in the *Gita* as well, but Swamiji emphasized it, made it explicit.[13] Swamiji wanted us to think that we are divine, but not in a superficial way. He wanted us to feel our divinity so that we could act from that standpoint. This is the starting practice, not the end point.

According to Swami Vivekananda, '...the first thing we need is *Chittashuddhi*, purification of the heart. And how does that come? The first of all worship is the worship of the *Virat* — of those all around us. Worship It.'[14] As Swamiji said at Thousand Island Park, 'Do not seek for Him, just see Him.' If we think this world is real, then it is God, and we can see Him. (If it is unreal, then we have to seek Him.)[15] We can feel the spirit of Swamiji in his words: 'God Himself has appeared as man; kneel down before Him and offer Him worship.'[16] Swami Ashokananda extended this thought to its logical conclusion: 'Every *action*, therefore, will have to be conceived as a form of worship.' That is, our action is first worship and then work. Imagine the effects of this practice on worshippers and worshipped alike. This is a practice that can be done from moment to moment when the opportunity presents itself.[17] Most working folk — most of the world's people for that matter, do not have the hours it takes to do elaborate worships, meditate, do japa, take part in devotional singing, or listen to spiritual discourses. If in our day-to-day jobs we could transform our work into worship, we would be on the way to realizing the divinity of the *Virat*. Radical? Perhaps, but we can test this practice ourselves. There may be unexpected effects.

Arnold Toynbee, philosopher and historian, found from his study of civilizations that the agents of the great changes in civilizations were often small groups which he called 'creative minorities'. Undoubtedly, we can all cite examples, but we will mention a few: in America the founders of the republic; in India Gandhi's work for independence; in America in this century the young African-Americans, college age men and women, who learned Gandhi's principles of passive resistance and set America on the road to racial equality;[18] and of course, Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples and their leader, Swami Vivekananda, who organized a religious order and initiated

13. *Meditation*, p. 130.
14. *C.W.*, vol. 3, p. 301.
15. *Meditation*, p. 118.
16. *Meditation*, p. 126.
17. *Meditation*, pp. 125–6.
18. David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998), pp. 506–18. [Hereafter, *The Children*.]

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a programme of service for his fellow countrymen.

It seems that in America a shift from the hedonistic-materialistic culture to a culture in which spiritual values are evident and important is already underway. Vedantins along with countless other spiritually minded people make up the creative minority, which becomes a force for change. By adopting a spiritual base for work, for example, work as worship, and spontaneously acting as models, other workers imitate the models and spiritual values spread. Grand historical theories such as Toynbee's are never very much in favour with the historians who focus on very specific empirical events, nonetheless, Toynbee's theory of creative minorities strikes us as sound. We should not despair; there are silent creative minorities doing their work of change — their karma yoga, a start has been made.

To go back to Swamiji, he also made a second contribution to the interpretation of the *Gita* when he singled out Sri Krishna's words, 'By action alone'[19]. He took those words literally, and gave us a new slant on the doctrine of karma yoga. In this path neither religion, religious faith, nor metaphysics are necessary. All that is required is the practice of selflessness; the goal is freedom:

> Karma-Yoga, therefore, is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness, and by good works. The karma-yogi need not believe in any doctrine whatever. He may not believe even in God, may not ask what his soul is, nor think of any metaphysical speculation. He has got his own special aim of realizing selflessness; and he has to work it out himself.[20]

This method of karma yoga based solely on selflessness calls to mind Buddha, who was for Swamiji, the perfect karma yogin. Furthermore, it shows the vision of Swamiji who has included a practice in this age of Man suitable for agnostics and atheists.

Karma yoga seems to be one thing in the world that we can have both ways — with God or without God. The potential of karma yoga is mighty, powerful enough to make the profound change which Mr. Havel refers to as an 'existential revolution'[21]. A revolution in the hearts of men and women is exactly what Swami Vivekananda had in mind — a call to greatness.[22]

And finally, Swami Ashokananda pointed out that our work is a grand sacrifice, or as he suggested — call it renunciation and service.... The following paragraphs from Swami Ashokananda's lecture 'Ritualism' tell us one way to perfect the practice of karma yoga:

> A person working in a factory, in an office, or in the kitchen, a person cleaning the street, or standing on the platform and teaching — that is the grand worship.... Consider how much absorption and concentration there is in everything that we do in our daily life — preparing a dinner, in cleaning the house, in working in the office, in going from place to place. Our whole heart and soul is there; deep meditation is there.
>
> If we make ourselves conscious of the fact that everything we do we are doing unto God, that it is a worship, an offering, a sacrifice, then *here* is the great ritual.[23]

This great ritual is the heart of karma yoga. ❐

19. *Bhagavad Gita*, ch. 3, sl. 20.
20. *C.W.*, vol. 1, p. 111.
21. *Civilization*, p. 53.
22. *The Children*.
23. *Meditation*, p. 162.

> When all the ties of the heart are severed here on earth, then the mortal becomes immortal. This much alone is the teaching.
>
> —*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, II.3.15

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A Glimpse of the Holy Mother — The Archetypal Ideal Feminine

DR. SUDIPTA DAS

The learned author of Louisiana, U.S.A., points out in this article that 'the Holy Mother stands incomparable as one of the most compelling and evocative spiritual and cultural icons of world civilizations. Her illustrious life remains the mirror in which the eternal soul of India reflects. She remains immortalized not simply for what she did, great and imperishable though her deeds are, but for what she stood for as the archetypal ideal feminine, radiant and triumphant, beyond the creeds of the world. Renewed expressions of her divine motherhood, spirituality, vitality, and intimate relevance are signs that millions of people continue to be moved by her mystery and touched by the notion of her caring. Whatever aspect of Sri Sarada Devi one reflects upon and embraces, he who seeks her out will surely find something only a Holy Mother can bestow.'

The author further points out that 'if by current definition feminism implies a new approach based on women's experiences that demands a change in values and institutions and not merely a power shift from one individual to another, then feminists all over the world ought to first reconstruct and redefine feminine values and restore the female image from the denigration into which it has sunk through sheer complacency or through a misconceived vision.'

The author emphasizes the need to focus 'not on equality but on women's education and dominance in the home, and ... the powerful role of women as the custodians of future generations.' She says in this context that 'the Holy Mother ... may be distinguished as the foremost feminist of the new era, in that she redefined female values, reinforcing the perception that women's lives are irrevocably intertwined with responsibilities and commitments of nurturance, love and understanding for others, and for preserving family, religion, and national traditions. She offered women a vision and understanding of their real identity as the manifestations of the Mother of God, the Madonna, the Mother of Grace, Love and Power or Shakti. *The self-esteem that Sri Sarada Devi conferred upon all of womanhood by her renunciation of sensuality and idealization of chaste love should be understood, admired and internalized by the women of the world. In this light, the concept of gender liberation runs much deeper and is thus too complex to be explained away in terms of individual autonomy.'*

This attempt at the portrayal of Sri Sarada Devi (1853–1920), God-incarnate Female, brings to mind the idea that 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread'. The effulgence of her extraordinary life can never be recreated in mere words but can only be cherished in spirit. She remains the glory of Indian womanhood as the unparalleled virgin wife, ever forbearing like Mother Earth. Her life of quiet renunciation and selfless service stands as a monument etched in gold in the rich spiritual history of India, her full significance being comprehensible and soul-stirring to the truly devout. Wife and divine consort of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) as well as mother of matchless genre to millions of men and women, Sri Sarada Devi renewed and reinforced the central ideal of Hindu woman-

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hood, underscoring that a woman is fulfilled only in her role as a mother — not simply a biological mother, but a blend of mother and teacher, representing a confluence of self-offering total love, tireless devotion to work, and a caring commitment to the preservation of values for emulation by future generations.

Sri Sarada Devi awakened Indian womanhood to a new awareness of femininity, of feminine power and esteem, through the cultivation of absolute chastity, modesty, forbearance, unselfish commitment and unobstructed love. Emblazoned in every solemn Hindu heart as Sri Sri Ma or the Holy Mother, she continues to inspire and radiate an enchanting hue of practical spirituality and idealism, perfectibility and unlimited compassion embodied in her quintessential and divine motherhood. 'One's mother and one's motherland are superior to heaven itself', was a maxim she often repeated to her devoted children. Hers was an all-embracing mother-heart which wrapped itself in love around each child born of woman, and her family was the human race.[1] A divine soul deserving of universal reverence, Sri Sarada Devi remains immortalized as the architect of the spiritual renaissance of Indian womanhood, as well as the reflection, resurrection, and culmination of India's sacred and distinctive feminine ideals in modern times. In a word, she translated the perceived ideal of 'glorious womanhood' into a living reality.

Swami Vivekananda once said, 'in India the woman was the visible manifestation of God and that her whole life was given up to the thought that she was a mother, and to be a perfect mother she must be chaste'[2]. The mother image as the symbol of perfect chastity and desireless love remains at the pinnacle of feminine ideals of spiritual India. The mother is honoured as the manifestation of the primordial energy of the universe, and ranked the highest among all the female relations of man.[3] Sri Sarada Devi, the focus of this study, was the living embodiment of chastity, purity, and selfless motherhood. She was born to renew the core Hindu concept of the 'Divine Feminine' or *Shakti* (meaning power), which complements the 'Divine Masculine' in the shaping of a perfect whole. Her life represents the manifestation of *Shakti* through the practice of exalted virtues, which earned for her the admiration of millions as the archetype of the perfect woman and mother. Her motherhood derives greater relevance and significance because it rekindled the image of the ideal Hindu female at a time when India was experiencing a terrible crisis of the spirit. On the one hand, Western scientific ideas were dealing severe blows on all religious beliefs of the nineteenth century which were based merely on faith. On the other hand, the British rule in India was threatening India's individuality, self-confidence and cultural identity. It is a fact of history that when such challenges come to civilizations, equal and opposite responses also come from within to perpetuate that culture by arresting the opposing tide. Sri Sarada Devi and Sri Ramakrishna were such powerful responses from India to fulfil a global need. Through a reconstruction of varied anecdotes from Sri Sarada Devi's life, as much as space would allow, this study proposes to reveal the power and respectability that this magnanimous lady resuscitated among Hindu women through her exemplary living, at a time when the social degeneration of the female had reached its nadir. In course of time however, this influence extended to the rest of the world also.

Sri Sarada Devi's divinity and spiritual stature enshrined her as the incarnation of the

1. Laura Glenn or Devamata, quoted in Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1962), p. 2. [Hereafter, *Holy Mother*.]
2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 3, p. 506.
3. *Manu Smṛti*, II.

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Mother of the Universe and provided spiritual strength and regeneration to droves of devotees whom she embraced as her very own children. Through her, the age-old values of Hindu womanhood were re-formulated and re-executed under modern conditions. While any investigation as the actual realization of these virtues by modern women falls beyond the purview of this study, it nevertheless aspires to serve as a pointer to the pattern of life to be adopted by every woman, urban or rural, Hindu or non-Hindu even. *The Holy Mother's life remains a ransom to the movement of Indian feminism, whereby she demonstrated that real emancipation lay not in the crusade for sexual equality, nor in a recognition of equal sexual ability in every sphere, but in the building of female character and virtues which would form the essence of female power.* An active heroine and truly the First Lady of spiritual India, Sri Sarada Devi's exemplary living personified the fulfilment of the feminine ideal which could once more enshrine Hindu women on the pedestal of male admiration and reverence as worthy manifestations of the Eternal Female.

Through the *Shodasi Puja*, Sri Ramakrishna consecrated Sri Sarada Devi as the mortal embodiment and symbol of the Divine Mother on earth. He worshipped her as the living goddess and saw no difference between her, his earthly mother, and Kali, his Divine Mother. The significance of this worship for Sri Sarada Devi was that it awakened in her the realization of her divinity as the manifestation of the Eternal Feminine for all humanity to worship.[4] Swami Gambhirananda (the chief biographer of Sri Sarada Devi) tells us that Sri Sarada Devi, on descending to her normal awareness after the spiritual awakening did not lose her awareness of her identity with the divine and retained it throughout her life. In addition, the worship symbolized her participation in Sri Ramakrishna's life and in his spiritual ministry.

'To me it has always appeared,' wrote Sister Nivedita, 'that she (Sri Sarada Devi) is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood.'[5] Perhaps the answer to her question, 'Is she the last of an old order or the beginning of a new?', is that Sri Sarada Devi constituted a bridge between the past and the present, between the old and the new, between the eastern and the western. All the virtues idealized by the Hindu female from Vedic times were fully manifested in her. Yet, she also had a perfectly modern mind. She fought orthodoxy and stereotyped roles and taught by example the key to self-esteem, respectability and liberation which women could achieve in a rapidly changing world scenario. In this way, she set the pattern for the evolution of a new generation of women along spiritual lines. In reality, through her the womanhood of the world was sanctified.

The various facets of Sri Sarada Devi's life would appear to be like the sun's beam passing through a prism, emanating many rays of brilliant hues. Purity, holiness, chaste love, and quiet suffering — all of which are attributes of exemplary motherhood — lie embedded in the heart of *every* woman. An ordinary woman captures in her life only a fraction of this ideal through the unselfish love she renders to her *own* offspring. A merely biological function thus becomes divine through the infusion of a spiritual value.[6] This spiritual value scintillated in its fullness outside of the biological context in the life of Sri Sarada Devi, unfolding mother-

4. By the devotees and others, *The Gospel of the Holy Mother* (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1984), p. xviii.

5. Quoted in Swami Hiranmayananda, 'Sri Sarada Devi: Sri Ramakrishna's Final Word as to the Ideal of Indian Womanhood,' in *Sri Sarada Devi: The Great Wonder* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1994), p. 202. [Hereafter, *The Great Wonder*.]

6. Swami Ranganathananda, 'Sri Sarada Devi, The Holy Mother', *The Great Wonder*, p. 207.

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hood in its pristine and purest form. Her conjugal relationship with Sri Ramakrishna was of an exalted and divine nature which precluded any carnality or sense gratification. It was a union of two great souls immersed completely and exclusively in God-consciousness. When Sri Sarada Devi's mother lamented her daughter's deprivation from experiencing the joys of motherhood (being married to an ascetic), Sri Ramakrishna wittingly remarked, 'Your daughter will have so many children that she will be tired of being addressed day and night as mother.'[7] And so it came to be. During her lifetime she became the mother of countless sons and daughters who were not of her flesh and blood at all, including several nephews and nieces and the residents, both Hindu and Moslem, of the villages of Jayrambati and Kamarpukur. Her motherly affection flowed unremittingly and impartially towards all. Out of the abundance of her human heart, she offered her love without distinction of caste, creed, colour, or race, earning for her the everlasting endearing epithet, the Holy Mother. To the women of the day and of posterity Sri Sarada Devi revealed that spiritual emancipation was possible through the self-effacing role of motherhood practised in the extreme, and that this was to be cherished and practised by every female aspiring towards the highest state of moral and spiritual evolution. On one occasion she revealed herself to her immediate disciples: '...The Master regarded all creatures as manifestations of the Divine Mother. He left me behind to give expression to this Motherhood.'[8] Her presence inspired reverence but never a feeling of remoteness. She said that, '...the excessive manifestation of divinity creates fear in the minds of devotees, they cannot feel intimate....' 'No one will know my real nature, so long as I am alive.'[9] Thus as long as she lived, she continued to identify herself with the sundry masses, sharing their experiences from the depth of her heart in joy and in pain. For thirty-four years after the *Mahasamadhi* of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother propagated the message that God is not merely an object of faith but that He (can and) has to be realized in one's own life through the exercise of renunciation and service, which Swami Vivekananda declared were the national ideals of India. Thus, her life beautifully blended work with worship and became exemplary of the essential character of womanhood.

'I am the mother of the virtuous, I am the mother of the wicked. When you are in distress, say to yourself, "I have a mother",' were the Holy Mother's assuring words.[10] She made each one of her countless devotees feel that he or she was specially her own. An immediate disciple of Sri Sarada Devi described what struck him most in her personality: 'I found here one in whose love there is no question of great or small, saint or sinner, one who could love each one in the same way and yet her eternal spring of love remained unexhausted as before.'[11] The same have been the experiences of countless other devotee-children who had the unique fortune of coming into proximity with Sri Sarada Devi. The secret of her unobstructed universal love was her spiritual eminence which enabled her to fulfil her motherhood with ease and naturalness. Through her service and teachings, she left a balm for troubled humanity in search of light and peace.[12] A silent yearning constantly welled up in her heart: 'Come all of you, I am here for your sake. I shall soothe my heart by showing you the way to liberation.'[13] Swami Premananda admitted that he and the other Swamis of the Ramakrishna

7. Quoted in *The Gospel of the Holy Mother*, p. xx.
8. *Holy Mother*, p. 80.
9. Ibid.
10. Quoted in *The Gospel of Holy Mother*, p. 315.
11. Pranab Ranjan Ghosh, 'What Inspires Me Most in the Holy Mother's Life' in *The Great Wonder*, p. 387.
12. Swami Ranganathananda, 'Sri Sarada Devi, The Holy Mother', *The Great Wonder*, p. 209.
13. *Holy Mother*, p. 153.

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Math were indiscriminately sending to the Mother for receiving initiation, 'the poison' that they could not take themselves. She however gave refuge to everybody and absorbed their sins with ease.

Sri Sarada Devi's motherhood reached its apogee after Sri Ramakrishna's *Mahasamadhi* on 16 August 1886. Until then she played several roles including the role of the *sahadharmini* during her stay with Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar and Cossipore. However, between 1887 and her last days in 1920, Sri Sarada Devi's motherhood became fully manifest when she blended the roles of the mother and spiritual teacher. Her domestic life became conterminous with her spiritual ministry as she taught that even the most mundane duties could be performed as spiritual acts if these were carried out with devotion and selflessness.

The two prominent settings of Sri Sarada Devi's activities were Jayrambati, and the Udbodhan House in Calcutta. At Jayrambati she lived amidst a highly distracting environment of sheer worldliness, encircled by her greedy brothers, half-insane sisters-in-law and their demanding, insolent children. Far from shunning this surrounding, she embraced and enfolded everyone in her love. Amidst serious maladies that afflicted her, she never faltered in her services towards her avaricious brothers and their families, and Radhu, her eccentric niece. Whatever and whomever the world sent to her, she met with equanimity, adjusting herself to time and circumstances. And, the demands made on her by her family never withered her compassion. During the periods of her residence at Jayrambati, she sought, even in the unpleasant domestic atmosphere, to minister to the visiting monastic and lay devotees. Her godliness and spiritual grandeur enabled her to maintain a demeanour of utter detachment and renunciation, a sea of calm, poise and grace, while discharging at the same time her services to her kith and kin. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that a mother serves different dishes to suit the tastes and stomachs of her different children. In the same light, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's grace and love were bestowed on varied peoples in varied ways depending on the nature of their needs. Wherever she lived or went, she poured forth the elixir of love. Suffering was the cross she bore courageously and happily.

The Holy Mother's days were filled with unceasing activity, alternating with the stillness of prayer. Whether at the Udbodhan or in Jayrambati, her day commenced at three o'clock in the morning when she finished her ablution in the river in the utmost privacy. This was followed by several hours of deep meditation and prayer. In Jayrambati, at seven in the morning commenced her household chores, which included the shredding and preparing of vegetables, supervising supplies, making offerings to Sri Ramakrishna, distributing *prasadam* (consecrated food) to household members and visiting devotees, arranging their meals, kneading the flour, washing clothes, scrubbing pots and pans, cleaning the lamps, husking rice, and a multitude of other odds and ends. Sometimes she would be awakened at one or two in the morning by eager pilgrims who, not daring to cross the unshaded fields in the scorching heat of the day, would do so at night, thus arriving very late. Most often these were strangers. The Holy Mother seemed never perturbed nor displeased, and, whatever the hour, she would cook and serve them with the utmost care and affection, considering the visitor her own. In youth and in old age, her activities proceeded at the same rapid pace and with the same enthusiasm. To her, work was worship. Every small act was, to her, an adoration of God. 'Without work, the mind become befouled,' she would say.[14] In a word, her life was the practical embodiment of the eighteen verses of the *Isha Upanishad*, which idealize selfless service as the loftiest goal of human existence. She once said that

14. Ibid., p. 131.

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whenever she desired, she would understand in a flash that all these worldly activities were nothing but the play of *Mahamaya* (Eternal Illusive Power). Hence, she had no earthly expectations, and her life remained a saga of tireless, unselfish service.

Sri Sarada Devi did not publicly summon devotees, make campaign speeches, or resort to any propaganda or pageantry to broadcast her presence and whereabouts. Neither did she display a dynamic personality, spectacular behaviour or aggressive magnetism. Rather, she was the epitome of modesty and humility, choosing to live most of the time in the unobtrusive seclusion of the malaria-infested village of Jayrambati rather than in the greater ease and comfort of the city. Drawn by her irresistible motherly affection and affable divinity which radiated an inexpressible peace to those who came into her presence, people undertook the hazardously long journey to the remote village where they enjoyed greater accessibility to her than when she was in the city. The Holy Mother, fully aware of their pain-stricken sojourn, offered them all the hospitality that could be extended from her meagre resources. When questioned by disciples as to why she over-exerted herself to gratify her relatives and serve her devotee-children endlessly, she merely remarked that she had done more than was necessary to set up a model for others.[15] Encouraged by her motherly liberalism, devotees thronged to her at all hours, transgressing rules without compunction. The Mother was ever willing and ready to grant visitors her *darshan* (audience) and entertain them with some refreshment or even a sumptuous noonday meal or supper. While they ate, she would sit and tenderly supervise the partaking of food in the nature of an earthly mother. Often, she would eat only after the devotees had eaten and after she had cleaned their leftovers. Once when criticized by some orthodox disciples who suggested that by performing such menial work she was actually denigrating her high-birth status, Sri Sarada Devi gently explained: 'Do you see, I am their mother! If the mother would not wait upon the child, who would?'[16] We discover the unusual depth of her love and commitment in one of her precious statements: 'If a thorn hurts the sole of your foot, I feel as if a plowshare has gone into my heart.'[17] Swami Premananda wrote of her, that an empress among queens had, as it were, become of her own accord a beggar and did all the menial work with her own hands. She endured hardship to teach householders how to perform their duties. In her exalted and endearing style, Sri Sarada Devi never allowed any departing visitor — whether devotee or stranger — to bid farewell. In typical Hindu fashion, her parting words were always: 'Come again, my child.' Paucity of physical and fiscal resources did not deter her from striving to offer the best hospitality to numerous visitors, rich and poor alike, for long periods of time, even though it deprived her from meeting basic personal needs like food, clothing, rest and medical expenses. As a devotee reflected, the Holy Mother's concern for others was no diffuse altruism which tires of its zeal before it has run half its course.[18] The lamp of love glowed eternally in her heart generating warmth and motherly affection for every soul without distinction or disparagement.

Sri Sarada Devi's compassion was especially directed towards the spiritual upliftment of her children. In this respect, she remains distinctive from the ordinary earthly mother. Once, when a monastic disciple asked her, 'How do you regard us?' she replied, 'As God Himself.... I regard you as God

15. Ibid., p. 157.

16. Swami Mumukshananda, 'Spiritual Ministrations' in *The Great Wonder*, p. 451.

17. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, p. 157.

18. Probodh Babu and Manindra, 'Reminiscences' in *The Gospel of the Holy Mother*, Part 2, p. 256.

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and also as children.'[19] She initiated her devotee-children, not only in the sanctity of a holy shrine, but under unusual circumstances and in the least convenient locations—from her sick bed, on road or railway platform, in the open meadow or under trees—solely with the disciple's convenience and spiritual welfare in mind. Whoever had the extraordinary fortune to seek her divine grace received it with unqualified love and attention. Sri Sarada Devi even went to the extent of performing *japa* for her countless disciples. She would stay awake at night or wake up at two o'clock in the morning to repeat *japa* for the initiated. She assumed the spiritual responsibility of her disciples as well as absorbed their sin and suffered vicariously for them, who were in her eyes her very own and beloved children. Those who had the rare blessing of meeting the Mother learned that religion was a joyous experience and that purity and holiness were tangible realities exuding a sweet perfume that overlays and destroys the foulness of material selfishness. In short, the Holy Mother's presence was a dynamic and inexhaustible source of strength, peace and stability.

Vedanta philosophy depreciates the physical world by emphasizing its illusory nature. The Holy Mother offered an affirmative reinterpretation to this negative refutation by revealing the innate oneness of the universe. She taught one disciple, the mother of Annapurna, during her last moments: 'If you want peace, my child, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger....'[20] Her entire life was exemplary of the ideal of forgiveness which she practised as a *tapasya* (austerity). All were alike in the infinitude of her love. She respected the God within every being and left a lasting imprint of her flawless and sweeping cosmic vision through the thousands of souls she personally blessed and redeemed and through many more millions who worship her today, internalizing her teachings of practical Vedanta and spirituality. The children who became the recipients of her enchanting, unselfish love were transformed and reawakened to a new perception of themselves and of the universe. Cheap worldly love became insignificant for them as they evolved into a new level of spiritual consciousness and selfless commitment, creating the bulwark, *sui generis*, of the distinctive Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Mission monastic orders for men and women. With Sarada Devi as the nucleus and the inspirational force, these monastic movements grew rapidly in the subsequent years, with branches all over India and in the West. Numerous other public institutions such as schools and colleges, dispensaries and hospitals, and orphanages have since grown up in modern India as concrete manifestations of the lofty principle she stood for, selfless service to suffering humanity viewed as divine. As the Madonna of modern India, she carries the torch of Sri Ramakrishna to a splendid culmination.

The Holy Mother's health took a fatal turn towards the end of 1919 when she became afflicted with *Kala-Azar* (Black Water Fever), for which there was no cure at that time. She was brought to Calcutta in an emaciated condition owing to recurring fever, and she entered *Mahasamadhi* on 21 July 1920. No divine incarnation was worshipped, while living, in the way Sri Sarada Devi was. Her life and motherhood glow as a beacon light for women everywhere, then, now, and for all time to come. In her the world found a unique figure in its history, a great soul whose life became a ransom for universal womanhood through her concurrent roles of the perfect wife, nun, compassionate mother, and spiritual preceptor. Yet, the most inspiring element in her life was her unconditional love for every being. 'To err is human,' she taught, 'but how few know how to lead an erring

19. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, p. 163.
20. Quoted in *The Gospel of the Holy Mother*, p. xxxviii.

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man!'[21] Mother love never quibbles or argues; it simply accepts the child as it is.

Indeed, the one big need of this age is the kind of unconditional love we find manifest in the Holy Mother. Modern man, having acquired all the external necessities, has yet to find that one cohesive power or *Shakti* without which life is meaningless and incomplete. As Sri Sarada Devi demonstrated, the source and fountain of this love is the ideal woman, a manifestation of the Eternal Female, who predominates in her role as the mother. Herein lies Sri Sarada Devi's significance to modern womanhood. 'You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life,' wrote Swami Vivekananda from America. 'Without *shakti* there is no regeneration for the world.... Mother has been born to revive that wonderful *shakti* in India.'[22] Indeed, Swamiji's prognosis continues to crystallize in recent years with the efflorescence of remarkable Indian women in the fields of spirituality, politics, arts, science and literature.

The great beginning of this feminine renaissance was marked by the advent of Sri Sarada Devi, who manifested to the world the latent and kinetic divinity of women as symbols of the primordial energy and the significance of feminine virtues as a positive and ennobling force in the shaping and spiritualization of human civilization. Last but not the least, the Holy Mother's life of renunciation and selfless service comes as an eye-opener for radical feminists, whose numbers are increasing in India today. Influenced by Western perceptions of sexual equality, they seem to be losing touch with the noble vision offered by Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi as well as by earlier spiritual souls of India, that true emancipation comes from the conquest of the self, meaning emancipation from such recurring evils as rampant egotism, ruthless competition, self-centredness and psychopathic exhibitionism. If by current definition feminism implies a new approach based on women's experiences that demands a change in values and institutions and not merely a power shift from one individual to another, then feminists all over the world ought to first reconstruct and redefine feminine values and restore the female image from the denigration into which it has sunk through sheer complacency or through a misconceived vision. According to India's five-thousand-year-old cultural heritage and as exemplified by Sri Sarada Devi, a woman's strength lies in her virtues and not in her external manifestations. It is better to be a perfect woman than to be an imperfect man. One may iterate Mahatma Gandhi's conviction that women can turn their subordinate position to one of strength and influence through the exercise of moral suasion.[23] Even leading women contemporaries of Sri Sarada Devi, including the great female activist Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949), focused not on equality but on women's education and dominance in the home. They idealized the powerful role of women as the custodians of future generations. The Holy Mother's life and teachings belong to this corpus of feminist literature once feminism is redefined in these ways. She may be distinguished as the foremost feminist of the new era, in that she redefined female values, reinforcing the perception that women's lives are irrevocably intertwined with responsibilities and commitments of nurturance, love and understanding for others, and for preserving family, religion, and national traditions. She offered women a vision and understanding of their real identity as the manifestations of the Mother of God, the Madonna, the Mother of Grace, Love and Power or *Shakti*. The self-esteem that Sri Sarada Devi conferred upon all of womanhood by her renunciation of sensuality and idealization of chaste love should be under-

21. Sarah N. David, 'What Inspires Me Most in the Holy Mother,' in *The Great Wonder*, p. 360.

22. *Complete Works*, vol. 7, pp. 416–17.

23. Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India*, 10 April 1930.

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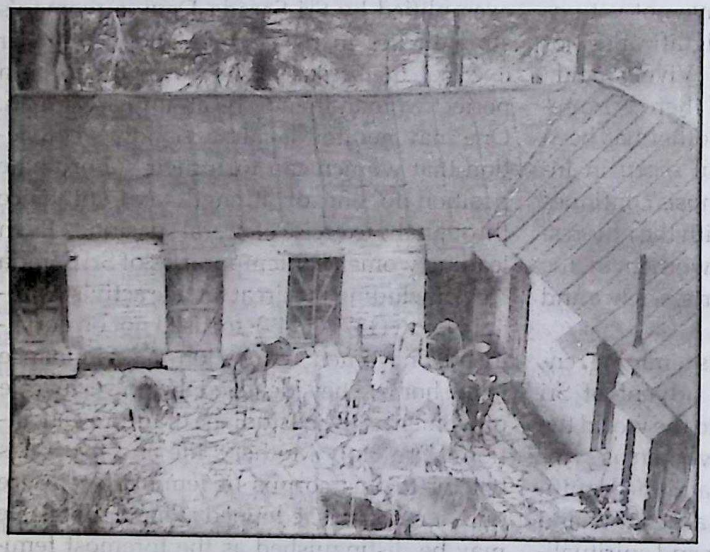
stood, admired and internalized by the women of the world. In this light, the concept of gender liberation runs much deeper and is thus too complex to be explained away in terms of individual autonomy.

In the final analysis, the Holy Mother stands incomparable as one of the most compelling and evocative spiritual and cultural icons of world civilizations. Her illustrious life remains the mirror in which the eternal soul of India reflects. She remains immortalized not simply for what she did, great and imperishable though her deeds are, but for what she stood for as the archetypal ideal feminine, radiant and triumphant, beyond the creeds of the world. Renewed expressions of her divine motherhood, spirituality, vitality, and intimate relevance are signs that millions of people continue to be moved by her mystery and touched by the notion of her caring. Whatever aspect of Sri Sarada Devi one reflects upon and embraces, he who seeks her out will surely find something only a Holy Mother can bestow. ❐



The old dairy

Tiffin Top on Lohaghat Road

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Swami Vivekananda at Ridgely

SISTER GARGI

On 27 June 1998, the Vivekananda Retreat, Ridgely, situated in New York State west of the Hudson River, was formally inaugurated as a branch center of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. A report of the ceremony, by Sister Gargi, appears later in this issue. During the course of the inauguration ceremonies, the following paper was read by Sister Gargi. Summing up Swamiji's activities during his stay at Ridgely Manor, the learned author says, 'He played like a child, he talked like a prophet, he transformed lives, he soundly napped on the green couch, which is still here, and he laughed with God.' She continues, 'Swami Vivekananda wasn't just your ordinary illumined saint. He was commissioned by Sri Ramakrishna to be a World Teacher. He was divinely empowered and he can, and will, change the course of our times.' Herein lies our hope for a more sensible state of affairs in the millennium to come.

I do not think that a better place than this could be found in America for a Vedanta Retreat — even if Swami Vivekananda had never stayed here. But of course we all know that the reason this place is so very special is that Swami Vivekananda *did* stay here, not once but three times. The first two times were during his first visit to America and were comparatively short — about ten days each. The third time was at the start of his second visit. That time, he came directly to Ridgely from the ship that brought him to America from England, on his way from India. And here at Ridgely he stayed for ten weeks in the late summer and early autumn of 1899. Or, to be more precise, from 28 August to 7 November. Most of you know that.

I want to talk briefly about Swami Vivekananda's visits here. But I thought that first, I would say a little about the Swami himself — even though that will be like a rain drop trying to speak of the ocean. But the very fact that Swami Vivekananda is too vast for me to speak about is the very thing that makes his having lived here so momentous. Of course, Swamiji's devotees are accused these days of being worshipful. That's right. And we have good reason to be.

True, Swami Vivekananda, after all, was a human being — yes. But his psychology was not the same as that of ordinary humans — and by ordinary I don't mean just the ordinary run of people; I include the great among humanity — scholars, philosophers, artists, scientists, those who have achieved mightily, and those whose character has made them heroes for us to emulate. Swami Vivekananda's psychology differed from that of the so-called normal person. On the other hand, he was not abnormal; I think one could say he was *super*normal. Certainly he was supersane. He was, in a sense — though he himself would never have said so — a different breed, come from a different world. The reason for his difference is very simple. As I see it, it was just this: his mind was absolutely free of the usual desires that motivate almost all of us and that make us tick.

As students of Vedanta know, what has happened to such a person, is that the true inner essence of a human being — or of any being — has been revealed, one might say, released —released from bondage; or uncovered from the dark wraps that, generally speaking, muffle us. And when that Self is uncovered or released, its glory shines out undimmed. Because nothing shadowed or covered the Self in Swami Vivekananda, he

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manifested its joy, its power and its love *all the time.* He never stood in his own light, and in itself, that is an awesome thing, a worshipful thing. Actually, the light we — his devotees — worship in Swami Vivekananda is our own light, but it came through him like the explosion of a giant supernova.

Aside from that, and perhaps one can say as a sort of radiation of that, he had great wit and humor, he was a wonderful conversationalist, he had an encyclopedic knowledge, he was warm and friendly, and, he was totally spontaneous. And what is more, Swami Vivekananda wasn't just your ordinary illumined saint. He was commissioned by Sri Ramakrishna to be a World Teacher. He was divinely empowered and he can, and will, change the course of our times. Now this is what was walking around here at Ridgely without wraps. Infinitely loving, infinitely joyful, infinitely gracious — that power was *walking around here!*

So when we make a big fuss over the fact that Swamiji lived here for ten weeks, it's not like saying 'George Washington slept here.' It's more like saying 'Lord Buddha walked here, and the whole place has thereby become holy for all time.'

With that in mind, let me now, as far as I am able, follow Swami Vivekananda — this dynamo of spirituality — around Ridgely during his stays here.

His first two visits were in 1895 — the first in April and the second during the Christmas holidays. It is certain that he slept during those visits in the main house. During the ten weeks in 1899 he slept for the most part in what was known as the 'Little Cottage'. But every day, as far as we know, he came to the manor house in the early morning to be with his hosts and the other guests and stayed until late at night. He did all his living here.

And his spirit soared; he was under no pressure to lecture or hold classes, or even to speak when he did not feel like speaking, but whenever he wanted, he could talk freely and long. 'We are having such privileges as only Swamiji can confer,' Betty Leggett wrote to Sara Bull. 'His talks are intermittent, his health improving, his nights restful and he sleeps wonderfully.' And to her niece Alberta, Jospehine MacLeod wrote in retrospect, 'Days without speaking, days and nights continuous speaking. We followed his moods and kept ourselves busy in our own lives and happy when he wasn't about, so that there was no sort of weight put upon him.' 'I feel perfectly at home,' Swamiji wrote to Mary Hale, and indeed, he was not a guest here; he was in his own domain, doing as he pleased.

There is almost no spot in Ridgely that Swamiji did not touch with his presence. He walked through the grounds, he entered every room of the manor and in many of them spent hours on end. His rich voice rang through the house. His laughter, too. Once during his first or second visit here, Betty Leggett's son Hollister walked by Swamiji's closed bedroom door and heard peals of laughter coming from the room. When Swamiji emerged later, Hollister asked, 'Whom were you talking to?' 'I was alone in meditation,' Swamiji said. 'But what was all that laughter about?' Hollister persisted. And Swamiji replied, 'Oh, God is so funny!'

But let us start with the grounds. I am going to quote now and then from the chapter on Ridgely in *New Discoveries.*[1] So if some of you have read that chapter, there will be familiar words.

In the early morning, presumably before anyone else was up, Swamiji walked along a path that led from the 'Little Cottage', passed the 'Casino', which is now the Women's Retreat House or 'MacLeod House', and met a

1. For the benefit of the reader who may not be aware, Sister Gargi alias Marie Louise Burke is the author of the fascinating book *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries,* in six volumes. The set can be had from Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta.

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road that led across an open field. At the end of this road was a huge spreading oak, and there he would meditate — so regularly that the tree came to be known as 'Swami's Oak'. He would then take a path to the right and come to the 'Inn' (so-called because before Frank Leggett bought the property in 1892, it had been a boarding house run by two maiden ladies). Then full circle back to the 'Little Cottage'.

Later, after breakfast, when everyone was up, there may now and then have been a croquet game on the lawn, or perhaps a game of gentle tennis (there was a court near the Casino). Swamiji also tried his hand at golf on the three or four holes laid out on the grass and once (indeed on his first try) made a miraculous hole in one. In the cool, luminous air of sundown, there would have been strolls on the wide lawns, Swamiji making a picture that the young artist Maud Stumm, who was a guest, long remembered: 'With his flame-colored robes draped about him,' she wrote, 'what a figure he was as he strode the lawns of Ridgely! His stride came nearer to the poet's description of "a step that spurned the earth" than anything I ever expect to see again; and there was a compelling majesty in his presence and carriage that could not be imitated or described.'

But perhaps the best times were spent indoors or in the loggia — which was then an open, pillared porch on the left of the house as one faced it from the back, where the sun room is now. Here family and guests gathered in the daytime to read or talk, and here Swamiji would, if he was in the mood, give long, wonderful discourses on any subject under the sun, giving it a spiritual dimension and radiance that one would never have dreamed it could have. 'Nearly every day, Swami was wonderful in a new way,' a guest recalled; 'now it would be music that he dwelt upon, now art.' And sometimes, of course, the talk would be from the start about God or some aspect of spiritual life or thought. And the minds of everyone would be lifted to a different plane. Here, too, in the loggia, Swamiji would sometimes write. He wrote three poems that we know of at Ridgely and was 'writing a book on India and her people,' he said, 'a short chatty simple something'.

Meals were served, of course, in the dining room, except, perhaps, breakfast, which may have been served to Swamiji in the breakfast room whenever he wanted it. At lunch and dinner, Swamiji generally, if not always, sat on Mrs. Leggett's right. And very likely she sat at the far end of the table. So we can at least guess where Swamiji sat, but although the dining chairs are the same, the exact chair has long ago been lost in the shuffle. The dining table is at present owned by the owners of the Inn, but the contemporary photograph of the sideboard looks very much like the one that today stands in the room, and that piece of furniture may have witnessed the laughter and wonderful talk that took place at the meals.

These meals were generally more or less informal, Swamiji always at liberty to excuse himself for a smoke or a walk. There was, however, a way to hold him. 'A very quick word from Lady Betty (Mrs. Leggett) that she believed that there was to be ice cream would turn him back instantly, and he would sink into his place with a smile of expectancy and pure delight seldom seen on the face of anybody over sixteen.' Maud Stumm wrote, 'He just loved it, and he had all he wanted, too.' 'He particularly liked chocolate ice cream,' Josephine MacLeod related in her memoirs, '"because I, too, am chocolate, and I like it," he would say.'

But the meals were not always informal. At least once (special guests perhaps having come) 'a very large and elaborate dinner was given at Ridgely,' Maud Stumm again wrote, 'and the ladies were all in their loveliest gowns and jewels.' The china and silver and crystal were sparkling on the table. Maud had been half entranced by all this brilliance, and she remembered that the Swami, noticing her bemusement, had shattered it with a quiet

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word. Leaning toward her, he had said through all the noise of other talk, 'Don't let it fool you, Baby.'

Then there were the long after-dinner hours in the wide, central hall, that runs through the house from front to back, making a cheerful room, more lived in than the formal sitting room that adjoins it. Generally, the front and back doors would be open, and the pulsating sounds of the summer night would accompany Swamiji's mellow, yet authoritative tones as he talked on,. sometimes for hours at a time. Of those evening talks, held on chilly nights around a fire, Francis Leggett once wrote, remembering not the talks of 1899 but those of Christmas time in 1895. 'One night at Ridgely, we were all spellbound by his eloquence. Such thoughts I have never heard expressed by mortal man — such as he uttered for two and a half hours. We were all deeply affected.... Swami was inspired to a degree that I have never seen before or since.' But he was to witness that inspired state many times again in the summer and fall of 1899. Of that time, Miss MacLeod would write in her memoirs:

> One evening [Swamiji] was so eloquent, about a dozen people listening, his voice becoming so soft and seemingly far away; when the evening was over, we all separated without even saying goodnight to each other. Such a holy quality pervaded. My sister, Mrs. Leggett, had occasion to go to one of the rooms afterwards. There she found one of the guests, an agnostic, weeping, 'What do you mean!' my sister asked, and the lady said, 'That man has given me eternal life. I never wish to hear him again.'

But one could hear Swami Vivekananda again and again and the spell would never be broken. One would only be drawn deeper into the world in which he lived, one's mind lifted into that world's freedom and grandeur. He spoke of Shiva and of Sri Ramakrishna and of what he called his 'new message' — 'that all there is in life is *character*,' as Miss MacLeod put it, 'that Buddhas and Christs do more harm than good — for mankind is trying to imitate them, instead of developing its own character! That in one's greatest hour of need *one stands alone*.' Or as Maud Stumm recalled, 'Once he burst into the morning room declaring for "Liberty". "What do I care if Mahomet *was* a good man, or Buddha! Does that alter *my* own goodness or evil? Let us be good for our own sake on our own responsibility! Not because somebody way back there was good!"'

And so it went on. In Francis Leggett's study — upstairs, I think — he took drawing lessons from Maud Stumm, concentrating with full attention. And in this same room he once, in 1895, in gymnastic play lay on his back, balancing Mr.Leggett on his feet and when surprised by the sudden appearance of Josephine MacLeod, jumped up, sending Mr. Leggett flying through the air. 'This is a man's drawing room!' he rebuked the female intruder. 'Why did you not knock?' Then after a pause, during which Miss MacLeod had nothing to say, he laughed. 'Come, Joe,' he said, 'let us pick up what is left of Francis.'

He played like a child, he talked like a prophet, he transformed lives, he soundly napped on the green couch, which is still here, and he laughed with God.

There were dark moments, too, as when once late at night he revealed to Nivedita and Mrs. Bull a sense of despair in regard to his work and an anguish of heart over the betrayal and treachery of a disciple.

But beneath all that was a radiance that could never be dimmed, and day by day Ridgely became holy land. When once such power enters the very fibers of a place, nothing can eradicate it. It is a sort of mystery how a place can retain the vibrations of great spiritual power and love — but who, coming here, can doubt that it does? ❑

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By the Will of Rāma

PRAVRAJIKA SHUDDHATMAMATA

'Contrary to what it may seem, self-surrender is not something passive. It does not mean that we simply say to God, "I surrender myself to you," and do nothing. Self-surrender means that we constantly try to see God's will in everything, that we constantly try to see God himself in everything,' says the author in this extremely lucid and captivating article. Basing the article on the story in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna *of the weaver whose final conclusion was that everything happens by the will of God, the author drives home the central message in this total surrender to God: that what we are surrendering really is our ego.*

In Karma Yoga we surrender the fruits of action to God while in Bhakti Yoga we surrender our whole soul to God in loving devotion. The Vaiṣṇava *schools of South India hold that all paths to God lead ultimately to total surrender to Him. On how to practise this surrender which is considered a path in itself in devotional schools, the learned author cites three stages pointed out by Madhusudana Sarasvati, a doyen of Advaita: (1) I am surely His, (2) He is certainly mine, and, (3) I am doubtless He. The author discusses each of these attitudes of surrender in an arresting manner in this highly inspiring article.*

Why would anyone want
to learn anything but Rama?
—Nammāẏvār[1]

'God has put you in the world,' Sri Ramakrishna said one day to a devotee. 'What can you do about it? Resign everything to Him. Surrender yourself at His feet. Then there will be no more confusion. Then you will realize that it is God who does everything.' Ramakrishna then told the following story:

In a certain village there lived a weaver. He was a very pious soul. Everyone trusted him and loved him. He used to sell his goods in the market-place. When a customer asked him the price of a piece of cloth, the weaver would say: 'By the will of Rāma the price of the yarn is one rupee and the labour four ānnās; by the will of Rāma the profit is two ānnās. The price of the cloth, by the will of Rāma, is one rupee and six ānnās.' Such was the people's faith in the weaver that the customer would at once pay the price and take the cloth. The weaver was a real devotee of God. After finishing his supper in the evening, he would spend long hours in the worship hall meditating on God and chanting His name and glories.

Now, late one night the weaver couldn't get to sleep. He was sitting in the worship hall, smoking now and then, when a band of robbers happened to pass that way. They wanted a man to carry their goods and said to the weaver, 'Come with us.' So saying, they led him off by the hand. After committing a robbery in a house, they put a load of things on the weaver's head, commanding him to carry them. Suddenly the police arrived and the robbers ran away. But the weaver, with his load, was arrested. He was kept in the lock-up for the night. Next day he was brought before the magistrate for trial. The villagers learnt what had happened and came to court. They said to the magistrate, 'Your Honour, this man could never commit a robbery.' Thereupon the mag-

1. *Tiruvāymoẏi*, 7.5.1, by Nammāẏvār, trans. A.K. Ramanujam, in *Many Rāmāyaṇas*, ed. Paula Richman (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 32. [Hereafter, *Ramayanas*.]

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istrate asked the weaver to make his statement.

The weaver said: 'Your Honour, by the will of Rāma I finished my meal at night. Then by the will of Rāma I was sitting in the worship hall. It was quite late at night by the will of Rāma. By the will of Rāma I had been thinking of God and chanting His name and glories, when by the will of Rāma a band of robbers passed that way. By the will of Rāma they dragged me with them; by the will of Rāma they committed a robbery in a house; and by the will of Rāma they put a load on my head. Just then, by the will of Rāma the police arrived, and by the will of Rāma I was arrested. Then by the will of Rāma the police kept me in the lock-up for the night, and this morning by the will of Rāma I have been brought before Your Honour.'

The magistrate realized that the weaver was a pious man and ordered his release. On his way home the weaver said to his friends, 'By the will of Rāma I have been released.'[2]

The beauty of Ramakrishna's stories is that he wrapped profound teachings in humble garb. There is a simplistic veneer to this story in its language, its setting, and in the description of its main character that hides its real depth. The hero of this story sounds so ordinary. But we should not be fooled.

This is a story of a person who has totally surrendered himself to God. Like a cast-off leaf in a gale, or like a kitten who is happy wherever its mother places it, the weaver is content with whatever the Lord does with him. He doesn't bargain with his customers to try and get more money. He doesn't complain. He doesn't demand justice against wrongs done to him. He is the kind of person Krishna had in mind when he said: 'He who is not hateful towards any creature, who is friendly and compassionate, who has no idea of "mine" and the idea of egotism, who is the same under sorrow and happiness, who is forgiving; he who is ever content, who is a yogī, who has self-control, who has firm conviction, who has dedicated his mind and intellect to Me — he who is such a devotee of Mine is dear to Me.'[3]

Contrary to what it may seem, self-surrender is not something passive. It does not mean that we simply say to God, 'I surrender myself to you,' and do nothing. Self-surrender means that we constantly try to see God's will in everything, that we constantly try to see God himself in everything, as the weaver did. Swami Brahmananda once said:

> Surrender yourself fully to the Lord. There is nothing but him. 'Verily all this is Brahman.' He is all in all, and everything belongs to him. Never calculate. Is it possible to surrender oneself in a day? When surrender is achieved, everything is over. One should struggle hard for self-surrender.[4]

Why is self-surrender so difficult? Because what we are surrendering is our ego — our sense of 'I' and 'mine'. This is our greatest obstacle to God. In this path, we have to let go of everything and depend only on the Lord. How easy it sounds to live 'like a cast-off leaf in a gale,' as Sri Ramakrishna calls it. But when we try to put it in practice, we immediately find ourselves grabbing for something to hold on to. That 'something to hold on to' is in fact, our ego.

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2. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 'M.', trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1986), pp. 648–9. [Hereafter, *Gospel.*] As most people who are familiar with Ramakrishna's teachings know, he could just as easily have said Śiva, or Kālī or Krishna or Jesus or Allah, or any other name of God, instead of Rāma.

3. *Bhagavadgītā*, With the Commentary of *Śaṅkarācārya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991), verses 12.13–14, pp. 486–7.

4. *A Guide to Spiritual Life, Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda*, trans. Swami Chetanananda (St. Louis: The Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1988), p. 126.

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One aspect of self-surrender comes in the practice of Karma Yoga. Here we must, as the Gita tells us again and again, surrender the fruits of all our actions to God. We cannot claim ourselves to be the doer of anything, nor can we desire to enjoy the results of anything. This is not as simple as it may seem. As Swami Brahmananda said:

> Is it so easy to surrender oneself to God? Verbally many say: 'We have surrendered ourselves to God. We are doing what he makes us do.' But when we observe their lives, we see that their actions are quite contrary to what they say. If they do anything good, they take the credit for themselves. They say with pride, 'We did it, we did it.' But if there is any mishap, they blame God and say, 'He is giving us trouble and suffering.'[5]

According to Swami Satprakashananda,

> When a person gives up this ego to the Lord and works with a spirit of self-surrender, he gradually becomes freed from the trammels of *karma*. As long as one holds to the ego he is governed by law (i.e., the law of *karma*). But when he surrenders this ego to the Supreme Lord, then he enters into the sphere of grace.[6]

Swami Ramakrishnananda's life was a wonderful example of this type of self-surrender. When Swami Vivekananda came back from the West, he sent Swami Ramakrishnananda to start a centre in Madras. But Swami Ramakrishnananda's life was extremely difficult there. 'At one time, he gave eleven classes a week in different parts of the city, travelling by *jutka*, a narrow, uncomfortable horse-driven carriage. Sometimes he would return to the monastery after an exhausting day of classes and lectures to find that there was no food for supper.[7]

Once he arrived at a place where he was to give a class and found that no one had come. As Swami Ramakrishnananda described: 'The Swami waited for about a quarter of an hour but no one turned up. He then opened his Upanishad and began to read and explain with all ardour and amiability. After an hour he stopped, closed his book and said to the brahmacharin (who had accompanied him — probably Swami Shankarananda), 'Well, let us go.'... (Later the brahmacharin) asked the Swami: 'How is it that you gave the class for fully one hour though nobody turned up?' The Swami replied, 'I have not come to teach anybody, I only fulfil the vow I have taken.'[8]

But there is another aspect to this practice of self-surrender, and that is the surrender of one's whole soul to God in loving devotion. For such devotees, there is nothing else but God. They see God in and through everything. Describing the mental attitude that goes with this, S.N. Dasgupta says:

> The devotee's mind is always exhilarated with the divine presence of the Lord who animates all his senses — his inclinations, emotions and experiences. The fullness with which he realizes God in all his own activities and thoughts, and in everything else in the universe, naturally transports him to a sphere of being in which all mundane passions — antipathy, greed, jealousy, hatred — become impossible. With the divine presence of God he becomes infused with the spirit of friendship and charity towards all beings on earth. ...he is always infused with the consciousness that all his actions are under the complete sway of the Lord. He has no enjoyment for himself, for he always feels that it is the Lord who would enjoy Himself through all his senses.[9]

In the Śrī Vaiṣṇava School of South India, the greatest emphasis is laid on self-surrender as a devotional practice. In fact, it is consid-

5. Ibid., p. 67.
6. *Hinduism and Christianity*, Swami Satprakashananda (St. Louis: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1975), pp. 127–8.
7. *God Lived With Them*, Swami Chetanananda (St. Louis: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1997), p. 283. [Hereafter, *God*.]
8. *God*, p. 284.
9. *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Surendranath Dasgupta (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), vol. 3, pp. 87–8. [Hereafter, *History*.]

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ered a path in itself, and all other paths to God merely prepare one for self-surrender. Its power lies in the fact that God is not merely our only refuge and goal, he is also our only *means*. But this path requires a tremendous attachment to God.

According to Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, there are three ways one can practise this type of surrender. As he says:

> With the maturity of religious practice surrender of the ego to God emerges. It takes three forms:
>
> (a) I am surely His,
> (b) He is certainly mine, and,
> (c) I am doubtless He.[10]

I am surely His

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī says that this type of devotee has the attitude: 'Even if the sense of difference, the sense of dualism vanishes, O Lord, I am Yours and not You mine. The wave is a product of the sea and never the sea of the wave.'[11]

In the devotional school of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, the devotee's attitude is 'I am His', and his sole desire is to be a slave of the Lord. Moreover, he must always keep in mind that he belongs to the Lord and to no one else — especially not to himself. In one of Piýýai Lokācārya's works, he calls it 'theft of the soul' when one forgets that one belongs to God and considers oneself to be autonomous. Maṇavāýamāmuni comments on this, saying it is 'the root of all sin'.[12] When explaining the meaning of the great *mantra 'Om Namo Nārāyaṇāya'*, Piýýai Lokācārya says that the letter *'u'* in *Aum* (*Om*) means 'exclusively', which means 'subservient to no other'.[13] This means being subservient neither to oneself nor to another, but only to God.

Of the two, the worse is thinking one belongs to oneself. As Piýýai Lokācārya says, 'When one belongs to another, (the Lord) can redeem him by demonstrating his own distinctive excellence. When (the cetana, i.e., the individual soul) says he is his own, even the possibility (of redemption) is destroyed.'[14] Therefore, dedication to the Lord is again emphasized in the word *namaḥ*, which comes from *na* and *maḥ*. *Maḥ* means 'one belongs to oneself', and *na* negates that. Thus *namaḥ* means 'one does not belong to oneself'.[15]

The word *Nārāyaṇāya* refers to the goal, the Lord — to whom the devotee really belongs. Maṇavāýamāmuni says: 'The word "nārāyaṇa" can be construed in two ways: as a *tatpuruṣa* compound, reading "That abode of *Nāras* is Nārāyaṇa" or as a *bahuvrihi* compound, reading "The one whose abode is *nāras* is Nārāyaṇa". The word *nāra* means "things that are eternal and are not destroyed". It refers to individual souls, both bound and free, plus many other things, beginning with the Lord's qualities and attributes.[16]

A person must, above all else, love God only for the sake of love, without any other motive. This type of love eventually turns the devotee into a magnet, drawing the Lord to him. According to the *Ahirbudhnya Saṁhitā*, an important text of the Pañcarātra School, which had great influence on Śrī Vaiṣṇava worship, a person first takes up the attitude of adoration (*namaḥ*).

> (This) means the spontaneous acceptance of the highest Lord as the master on the part of a man who has achieved it through a wise

10. *Madhusūdana Sarasvatī on the Bhagavad Gītā*, trans. Sisir Kumar Gupta (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), p. 330, commentary on verse 18.66. [Hereafter, *BG*.]
11. *BG*, p. 330.
12. *The* Mumukṣuppaṭi *of* Piýýai Lokācārya *With* Maṇavāýamāmuni's *Commentary*, trans. Patricia Y. Mumme (Bombay: Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, 1987), p. 64.
13. Ibid., p. 65.
14. Ibid., p. 74.
15. Ibid., p. 73.
16. Ibid., pp. 80–1.

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enlightenment. Superiority (*jyāyān*) consists of greatness of qualities and existence in earlier time. God alone is superior, and everything else is inferior. The relation between the latter and the former is that the latter exists for the former or is dependent on the former.... The relation between the two is that one should be the adorer and the other the adored (*nantṛ-nantavya-bhāva*). True adoration is when such an adoration proceeds naturally as a result of such a relation, without any other motive or end of any kind — the only idea being that God is supremely superior to me and I am absolutely inferior to Him. This process of adoration not only takes the adorer to God, but also brings God to him. The presence of any motive of any kind spoils the effectuation of the adoration. This adoration is the first part of the process of *prapatti*, or seeking the protection of God.[17]

He is certainly mine

In describing the second type of surrender, 'He is certainly mine', Madhusūdana Sarasvatī uses the example: 'Well. Krishna, You are forcibly snatching Yourself away from me physically. How strange! I shall only praise Your valour if You can extract Yourself out of my mind also.'[18]

Here there is a closer, more intimate, relationship with God. But, despite the grace the Lord bestows, he does not make things easy. He tends to make up for his friendship and intimacy by the trials and tribulations he gives the devotee. And this is where the devotee must learn to surrender, seeing God behind everything. Once Saint Teresa of Avila was going through a time of great suffering and the Lord tried to console her by telling her, 'This is how I treat my friends.' Saint Teresa replied, 'No wonder you have so few of them!'

The first thing Swami Ramakrishnananda did when he came to Madras was to set up a shrine to Sri Ramakrishna and conduct worship to him, as he had at Baranagore, as if the Master was physically present. But the conditions in Madras were very uncertain, and often there was no food to offer the Master. 'One evening a few devotees came to the monastery to meet Ramakrishnananda, but he was in the shrine. They overheard him talking with someone loudly in angry tones: 'You have brought me here, an old man, and left me helpless. Are you testing my powers of patience and endurance? I will not go and beg hereafter for my sake or even for yours. If anything comes unasked, I will offer it to you and share the prasad. Or, I will bring sea sand for offering to you and I shall live upon that.' Later they realized that the Swami was quarrelling with his beloved Master.'[19]

Chokhamela, one of the many Maharashtrian saints of the thirteenth century, was another devotee whom God had made his very own. Because of his family's great devotion to Lord Panduranga, they moved from their home in Mangalvedhya to Pandurpur, even though they knew that due to their birth they would not be allowed to go inside the temple to worship the Lord. Nevertheless, they would stand outside the gate of the temple, with tears running down their cheeks, singing and praying to the Lord for his vision.

The Lord was greatly moved. One night he came to Chokhamela's house and led him by the hand to the temple and into the inner shrine. Hearing a commotion, the priest went to the shrine and discovered Chokhamela there. He became furious. He grabbed Chokhamela and dragged him to the other side of the river, warning him of dire consequences if he were ever to come inside the temple again. Chokhamela remained calm, understanding that 'The real Pandhari is in my own body and my soul is the Lord

17. *History*, pp. 53–4. (Dasgupta's translations of the *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā*, verses LII.2, 4 and 9.)
18. *BG*, p. 330.
19. *God*, p. 291.

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Vithala within.'[20]

Eventually Chokhamela built a small temple in his garden, and at the time of consecration he and his wife saw the living form of Lord Vithoba partaking of their food. In her exuberance and joy, Chokhamela's wife accidentally spilt some curd on the Lord's cloth.

Meanwhile, many people had come for the feast, and the news of all the events reached the ears of the priest at the main temple. Thinking that Chokhamela was either imagining things or trying to fool people, he became angry. 'How dare that untouchable pretend he is feeding the Lord!' he thought. 'I'll teach him!' He went to Chokhamela's house, gave Chokhamela a hard slap on the face, and then went to purify himself [from the effect of the touch] by taking a bath.

When the priest returned to the temple, he was stunned to find that the image of Lord Panduranga had a swollen cheek as well as a curd stain on his cloth. He ran to Chokhamela and fell at his feet, begging for forgiveness. He then took Chokhamela inside the temple and let him pray there as long as he liked.

I am doubtless He

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī says: 'The third (type of surrender) is the strongest of all, identified in the instruction of the king of death to his messenger: "Hands off from them whom you find to be firmly convinced that all this world of senses and they themselves are identical with Lord Vāsudeva, the Supreme Being, the God of gods." Ambarīṣa, Prahlāda, the milkmaids of Vrindaban fall in this category.'[21] We can also add here the name of Saint Catherine of Siena, who once exclaimed: 'I am He who is; thou art she who is not.'[22]

Of all the devotee stories in Hindu devotional literature, that of Prahlāda, as given in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, is probably the most remarkable. Even if we don't believe that any such '*daitya*' ever existed, still the author of the *Purāṇa* has left us a picture of an incredible saint, and to read the description of Prahlāda is itself an uplifting experience. As the *Bhāgavata* describes him:

> Like a servant he bowed low at the feet of the venerable; like a father, he was kind to the poor; he was affectionate like a brother to his equals and looked upon his elders as God Himself. Though endowed with learning, wealth, personal charm and high birth, he was altogether free from pride and arrogance. Always unperturbed at heart in the midst of calamities, he had no craving for sense objects, seen or heard of, since he looked upon them as unreal....
>
> Having laid aside playthings even as a child, Prahlāda,... (whose mind was fully) absorbed in the Lord, and whose soul was possessed by Lord Sri Krishna as though by some spirit, did not view the world as such (as it appears to worldly men, but as full of Sri Krishna). Sitting or walking, eating or drinking, lying down or speaking, he was never conscious of these acts, finding himself constantly folded in the arms of Lord Govinda.... Now imagining himself to be (none else than) the Lord and completely merged in Him, he imitated His doings. Enraptured by the thought of having become one with Him, he would now sit mute with the hair on his body standing erect and his half-closed eyes brimful with tears of joy brought by constant love. By devoted service to the lotus-feet of the Lord ... he not only brought supreme felicity to himself but also soothed the minds of others, miserable through evil inclination.[23]

But Prahlāda's father was Hiraṇyakaśipu, the lord of the *daityas*. And because of

20. *Saints of Maharashtra*, Savitribai Khanolkar (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1990), p. 61.
21. *BG*, p. 330.
22. *Women Saints of East & West*, ed. Swami Ghanananda and Sir John Stewart-Wallace (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1979), p. 216.
23. *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, trans. C.L.

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his great prowess and the boons he received from Brahmā, the Creator, Hiraṇyakaśipu had also become the ruler of all the worlds. To his great consternation, he one day discovered that his own son, Prahlāda, was greatly devoted to Viṣṇu, Hiraṇyakaśipu's greatest enemy and killer of his brother, Hiraṇyākṣa.

At first Hiraṇyakaśipu tried to have his son 'properly' educated, as Prahlāda was just a small boy then. But when that did not work, he became furious and ordered that Prahlāda be killed, The *daityas* tried everything — spears, poison, elephants, snakes, throwing him from cliffs, crushing him under boulders. But nothing worked. He could not be killed. Not only that, Prahlāda remained calm and unmoved under all circumstances, his mind solely fixed on his identity with Viṣṇu.

At last seeing that nothing could change his son, Hiraṇyakaśipu challenged Viṣṇu, saying that if Viṣṇu was really everywhere and in everything, let him come out of a pillar and rescue Prahlāda. Viṣṇu did just that. Taking the form of Nṛsiṁha (a Being who is half-Man and half-Lion), Viṣṇu slew Hiraṇyakaśipu and made Prahlāda king of the *daityas*.

Conclusion

When Girish Ghosh gave 'the power of attorney' to Ramakrishna, he thought his surrender was total, that self-surrender was easy, because he thought he would not have to do anything at all. In fact, he found that he had to constantly think of God with everything he did.

At the beginning, turning our minds to God seems like so much work. We little realize how great the reward is. If we could understand how much joy we would derive from doing it, we wouldn't like to think of anything else. Once Swami Shivananda wrote to a devotee: 'You complain you are mentally troubled. That is the nature of the mind. Sometimes you are happy and sometimes unhappy. You ought to be constantly thinking of the Lord. He is beyond both good and bad. The mind may be happy or unhappy, but what has that got to do with the Lord? Once you think of him, everything — good and bad — disappears. Then the mind is flooded with hope and joy.'[24]

The *Īśa Upaniṣad* says, 'All this — whatever there is in this changing universe — should be covered by the Lord.'[25] Somehow or other we have to keep our minds on God. That is the true meaning of self-surrender. If we can do that, then we will realize, as Sri Ramakrishna said, that it really is God who does everything.

Just before telling the story of the weaver and the will of Rāma, someone asked Ramakrishna, 'Can a man live in the world if his mind is once directed to God?' Ramakrishna replied: 'Why not? Where will he go away from the world? I realize that wherever I live I am always in Ayodhyā of Rāma. This whole world is Rāma's Ayodhyā.'[26]

Why would anyone want
to learn anything but Rama?
Beginning with the low grass
and the creeping ant
with nothing
whatever,
he took everything in his city,
everything moving,
everything still,
he took everything,
everything born
of the lord
of four faces,
he took them all
to the very best of states. —Nammāẏvār[27]

Goswami (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 664–5 (verses VII.4.32–33, 37–38 and 40–42).

24. *Shivananda-Patrasamgraha*, compiled by Swami Apurvananda (Barasat, West Bengal: Ramakrishna-Shivananda Ashram, 1962), p. 58 (letter no. 43). Trans. Swami Lokeswarananda.
25. *Īśa Upaniṣad*, 1.
26. *Gospel*, p. 648.
27. *Ramayanas*, p. 32.

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Swami Vivekananda and the American Women: A Study of Their Contacts (1893–1896)

DR. SATISH K. KAPOOR

Today science and technology have advanced to such an extent that time and space have lost their significance. This has brought together cultures that are wide apart, and the diffusion of one culture into the rest has become glaringly evident. Assimilation is good, but that has to be done after adequately judging the merits and demerits of the culture sought to be assimilated. In discussing the study of the contact between Swami Vivekananda and the American women, the learned author highlights the many bright aspects in Western culture pointed out by Swami Vivekananda in his lectures and letters. These are worthy of emulation. Swamiji also points out some bad features in the Western culture which the West must try to get rid of and the East try not to imbibe. So too there are good and bad points in the Indian context. The principle of assimilation is the same, to imbibe what is good and to eschew what is bad. The ideal is stated beautifully in the following words: 'Let the women distinguish between the good and the pleasant, the eternal and the ephemeral, the spiritual and the sensual. Only then they would be mentally at peace. Let them rise above sex-feelings and cultivate the qualities of chastity and continence.' And let their eyes open to spiritual vision.

I am almost at my wit's end to see the women of this country!... They are like Lakshmi (the Goddess of Fortune) in beauty, and like Sarasvati (the Goddess of Learning) in virtues — they are the Divine Mother incarnate and worshipping them, one verily attains perfection in everything.... If I can raise a thousand such Madonnas, Incarnations of the Divine Mother, in our country before I die, I shall die in peace.[1]

These words broadly epitomize the first impressions of Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) about the American women. No foreign traveller to the United States in the nineteenth century, not even Alexis de Tocqueville, evoked so much admiration, received so much help and became so intimate with its women-folk as the Hindu monk; and none, not even staunch feminists such as Dorothea Dix, Elizabeth Blackwell, Emma Willard or Lucy Stone, paid such glowing tributes to them as the Swami:

> American women! A hundred lives would not be sufficient to pay my deep debt of gratitude to you! I have not words enough to express my gratitude to you. 'The Oriental hyperbole' alone expresses the depth of Oriental gratitude — 'If the Indian Ocean were an inkstand, the highest mountain of the Himalaya the pen, the earth the scroll and time itself the writer' still it will not express my gratitude to you![2]

What formed the bedrock of relationship between the Oriental monk and the American women? Obviously, in the beginning, mutual curiosity and need were the prime factors — the Swami craving for home-atmosphere in an alien land, and the women looking for a spiritual curio from the East on the eve of the Chicago Parliament of Religions. But as time rolled by, the texture of relationship became finer and strong; in some cases, it grew from

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, vols. 1 to 8, 1989; vol. 9, 1997), vol. 6, p. 272; letter to his brother-disciples dated 25 September 1894 from New York. [Hereafter, *CW.*]

2. *CW*, vol. 6, p. 248; letter to Maharaja of Khetri in 1894.

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acquaintance into friendship; in others, it acquired psychic and platonic dimensions. In still others it became a seer-seeker relationship. 'We have come to you just as we would go to Jesus if He were still on the earth and ask Him to teach us,' remarked two American women (Mrs. Mary C. Funke and Christine Greenstidel) who travelled seven hundred miles from Detroit to the Thousand Island Park to be in his company.[3]

Swami Vivekananda, who went to Chicago in late July 1893 to attend the Parliament of Religions, learnt to his dismay that it was scheduled to open in the second week of September. Since he did not have sufficient money to live in a costly city like Chicago, he left for Boston. On his way he met Miss Katherine Abbott Sanborn, a distinguished author in her fifties, who became the Swami's first hostess in America. She invited him to her farm called 'Breezy Meadows' which lay near Framingham — a town in East Massachusetts. Through her he came into contact with F.B. Sanborn (Katherine's cousin), a well-known journalist and transcendentalist, and Professor John Henry Wright of Harvard University. Mr. Sanborn invited him to address the American Social Science Association in Saratoga Springs (New York) and Professor Wright asked him to spend his week-end at Annisquam. The Swami availed of these opportunities and created great impression on his hosts. Later, Professor Wright bought him a ticket to Chicago and gave him a letter of introduction which said: 'Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together.'[4]

Recalling the event of the monk's visit, Mrs. Professor Wright wrote to her mother:

> He was a most gorgeous vision.... and was one of the most interesting people I have yet come across.... The town was in a fume to see him; the boarders at Miss Lane's in wild excitement. They were in and out of the Lodge constantly and little Mrs. Merrill's eyes were blazing and her cheeks red with excitement.... He is wonderfully clever and clear in putting his arguments and laying his trains (of thoughts) to a conclusion. You can't trip him up, nor get ahead of him.[5]

Before leaving for Chicago, the Swami addressed the Rama Bai Club[6] and spent a week with Mrs. Kate Tannatt Woods, a middle-aged authoress, poetess and lecturer, at her house in Salem. He spoke before the members of Thought and Work Club which Mrs. Woods had founded in 1891. She provided the Swami with an opportunity to meet the Christian Clergy in Wesley Chapel and East Church. The encounter prepared him for his future skirmishes with the bigots among them.[7]

When Swami Vivekananda returned to Chicago he found himself stranded after having lost the address of the Committee which was to provide accommodation to the Oriental delegates. Again, a woman came to his rescue. Mrs. George W. Hale invited him to her house, served him like a good samaritan and accompanied him to the Offices of the Parliament where he was accepted as a delegate.[8]

This meeting proved to be of immense significance to the Swami, for the Hales' home later served 'as a kind of pivot for his Midwestern tour, an oasis to which he could return from time to time and there find the refreshing atmosphere of sheer goodness.'[9] Swami Vivekananda called Mrs. Hale, 'Mother Church', Mr. Hale, 'Father Pope',

3. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 6th edn., 1960), p. 360. [Hereafter, *Life*.]
4. *Life*, p. 297.
5. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2nd edn., 1966), pp. 20–1. [Hereafter, *New Discoveries*.]
6. *New Discoveries*, p. 48; *Life*, p. 297.
7. *Daily Gazette*, 29 August 1893, 5 September 1893; *Salem Evening News*, 1 September 1893.
8. *Life*, pp. 298–9.
9. *New Discoveries*, p. 191.

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and their two daughters (Mary and Harriet) and two nieces (Harriet McKindley and Isabelle McKindley) as 'sisters'. 'You are all so kind, the whole family, to me, I must have belonged to you in the past, as we Hindus say,' he once wrote to Mary.[10]

During the sessions of the Parliament, Swami Vivekananda stayed with Mrs. and Mr. John B. Lyon as a 'guest delegate', and was treated as a member of their family. From Cornelia Conger (Lyon's grand-daughter), we learn that the Swami did not keep a purse. So, after each public lecture he would wrap up the money in a handkerchief 'and bring it back — like a proud little boy — pour it into my grandmother's lap to keep for him'. According to Conger, the Swami was such a dynamic and creative personality that many women were quite swept away by him and made every effort by flattery to gain his interest. 'This used to trouble my grandmother, who feared he might be put in a false or uncomfortable position, and she tried to caution him a little.' Mrs. Lyon's concern touched and amused the Swami who assured her that nothing of this kind would ever happen.[11]

After his first appearance at the Chicago Parliament, Swami Vivekananda became virtually a celebrity. His graceful presence in gorgeous red apparel and large yellow turban, his somewhat portly form and lustrous eyes 'suggestive of deep spirituality', and his masculine grace 'like a great cat', as one lady described it,[12] made him look unique among cardinals and theologians. When he addressed the audience as 'Sisters and Brothers of America' there was a deafening applause which lasted for several minutes.[13] Thereafter, he thanked America for organizing such a vast assemblage of representatives of various faiths. He introduced Hinduism as the Mother of Religions, condemned sectarianism, and expressed the hope that the bell that tolled in honour of the Parliament may be 'the death-knell of all fanaticism, to all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and to all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.'[14]

The American press described the speech as the hit of the day. Miss S.E. Waldo (later Sister Haridasi), a distant relative of Ralph W. Emerson, who was present on the first day of the Parliament, recorded that his very first words in a melodious voice left the audience spellbound. 'So ready was his speech, so excellent his mastery of English, so finished his language, so flashing his wit and repartee, that every one supposed he was an experienced public speaker.'[15] Some ladies walked over the benches to gain proximity to him and touch the hem of his garment. The Church women of Chicago were reported to have almost fought with one another for the honour of shaking hands with him.[16] 'If ever there was a God on earth, that is the man,' exclaimed a woman in ecstasy. But when she saw the Swami swarmed by a score of pretty members of her sex, she said to herself: 'Well, my lad, if you can resist this onslaught, you are indeed a God.'[17]

In his twelve discourses both at the ple-

10. *CW*, vol. 8, p. 445; letter to Mary Hale dated 2 March 1898.
11. His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2nd edn., 1964), p. 145. [Hereafter, *Reminiscences.*]
12. Christopher Isherwood's Introduction in Swami Vidyatmananda, ed., *What Religion Is* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2nd Indian reprint, 1978), p. xvii.
13. See for example, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 September 1893.
14. For the Swami's Addresses at the Parliament see *CW*, vol. 1, pp. 1–24. For a critical study of these Addresses see my Master's dissertation 'Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions' (unpublished), University of London, 1975.
15. *Reminiscences*, pp. 122–3.
16. 'Hindu Attacks on Missionaries', *The Madras Mail*, 25 February 1897.
17. *Reminiscences*, p. 245.

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nary and 'scientific' sections of the Parliament, Swami Vivekananda preached the divinity of man, the oneness of existence, and the universality of all religions. His oriental dress made him a 'curiosity', his eloquence evoked admiration, and his wit applause. A press report noted that if the Swami merely crossed the platform, he was wildly cheered,[18] the women of course taking the lead.

The day Swami Vivekananda read his paper on Hinduism (19 September) the hall was packed to capacity. 'Ladies, ladies, ladies, packing every place—filling every corner,' wrote an American daily, 'they patiently waited and waited while the papers that separated them from Vivekananda were read.'[19] Another paper wrote in a similar vein: 'The Hall of Columbus was very full, for it had been announced that Swami Vivekananda, the popular Hindu monk, who looks so much like McCullough's Othello, was to speak. Ladies, ladies everywhere filled the auditorium.'[20]

After the close of the Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda received invitations from 'the handsomest houses' and lived as a guest of somebody or other.[21] He came across a number of women whose hearts were 'as pure and stainless as snow.'[22] They provided him food and shelter, arranged his lecture tours, took him out for recreation, cared for his shopping needs, and did everything for his comfort and convenience.[23] They shared his ideas and feelings and stood by him through thick and thin. Even when some Christian missionaries admonished them to beware of the 'dangerous heathen' or 'this unknown foreigner' who may be of 'a dangerous character', they clung on to him.[24] They took his critics to task in the columns of newspapers. Acknowledging this fact the Swami wrote to Manmatha Nath Bhattacharya: 'When anyone abuses me, he is condemned everywhere by the women.'[25]

'Their kindness to me is immeasurable,' wrote he. 'I shall never be able to repay in the least the deep debt of gratitude I owe to them.'[26] He expressed similar views in his letters to the Maharaja of Khetri,[27] his brother-disciples[28] and Bhattacharya.[29] 'Just think, if a man of this country were to visit India, nobody would even touch him; yet here I am allowed to do as I please in the houses of the best families — like their own son.'[30]

Swami Vivekananda who had heard scandalous stories about the American home: 'of liberty running into license, of unwomanly women smashing under their feet all the peace and happiness of home-life, in their mad liberty-dance,' realized after a year's experience in America that most of these were 'utterly false and erroneous'.[31]

'It is not the building that makes the home, but it is the wife that makes it,' says a famous Sanskrit adage. 'The roof that affords you shelter from heat and cold and rain is not to be judged by the pillars that support it — the finest Corinthian columns though they be — but by the real spirit-pillar who is the centre, the real support of the home — the woman,' said Swami Vivekananda. 'Judged by that standard, the American home will not

18. See the report of *Boston Evening Transcript* as it appeared in *The Indian Mirror*, 11 November 1893.
19. CW, vol. 5, p. 21; letter to Alasinga Perumal dated 2 November 1893.
20. *The Chicago Interocean*, 20 September 1893.
21. CW, vol. 5, p. 22.
22. CW, vol. 5, p. 24.
23. CW, vol. 5, p. 26.
24. CW, vol. 6, p. 248.
25. CW, vol. 7, p. 475.
26. CW, vol. 5, p. 26.
27. CW, vol. 6, pp. 247–8.
28. CW, vol. 6, p. 272.
29. CW, vol. 7, p. 476.
30. CW, vol. 7, p. 475.
31. CW, vol. 6, p. 248.

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suffer in comparison with any home in the world.'[32]

For about two years after the Chicago Parliament, Swami Vivekananda lectured in different parts of the Eastern and Central United States, first in contract with a lecture bureau and subsequently alone. His discourses in and around Chicago, and the Midwestern states created much interest among the women. He was invited to address the Ladies Fortnightly Club of Chicago towards the end of October 1893.[33] About a month later, he gave an informal talk on the 'Manners and Customs of India', at the house of Mrs. and Dr. H.O. Breeden of Des Moines. The local press described his lectures 'to be of the era-making type'.[34]

At Memphis, he was given a rousing reception by Mrs. S.R. Shephard (13 January 1894) and stayed most of the time at Miss Ginny Moon's Boarding Home, also known as La Salette Academy.[35] According to contemporary newspapers, he delivered six lectures which created 'a profound sensation in all cultured circles'.[36] Of these there needs a special mention, for they were largely attended and applauded by the Memphite women. On 15 January 1894, he addressed a large and fashionable audience composed of the Nineteenth Century Club and was given a befitting reception which was described as 'one of the pleasant events of the eventful year in club calendar'.[37] Two days later, he spoke on 'The Destiny of Man' in the rooms of the Women Council. He denounced the Christian concept of sin and stressed the divinity of human nature. 'Why teach that God is far away when our real nature, our immortal principle is God?' He was loudly cheered when he remarked: 'When Adam fell, he fell from Purity. Purity is our real nature, and to regain that is the object of all religions.... That man you call a brute, is like the diamond in the dirt and dust.' He pleaded for unity and variety in religion: 'If we all had the same ideas, the world would be dead.... Whirlpools show the strength of the current; stop the current and stagnation ensues. Motion is life.'[38]

The great impression created by Swami Vivekananda on the Memphite women is noticeable in the contemporary American newspapers. 'To them he is like the latest sensation,' wrote *Appeal Avalanche* of 20 January 1894, 'they never grow tired of talking about him.' Reporting the Swami's lecture on Metempsychosis which was delivered at La Salette Academy (19 January), the paper wrote: 'Two-thirds of the audience last night were feminine, and throughout the discourse, they were most attentive, taking in every word that dropped from the speaker's lips as if they were pearls being given up by the bottomless seas.'[39] Another lecture of the Swami (20 January) was frequently interrupted by questions from the women, one of whom tried to drag him into a discussion.[40]

In Detroit, Swami Vivekananda was the esteemed guest of Mrs. John J. Bagley — the widow of the ex-Governor of Michigan — who had first met him at the Chicago Parliament. She gave him a gala reception to which the elite of Detroit had been invited. The Swami stayed with her for four weeks and enjoyed her hospitality even during his subsequent visits. Mrs. Bagley 'gave him, as it were, the key to the city.'[41]

Swami Vivekananda's two visits to Detroit (12–23 February, and 9–30 March) during which he delivered eight public lectures and addressed many private gatherings, marked the most important phase of his itin-

32. *CW*, vol. 6, pp. 247–8.
33. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 457; letter to Adhyapakji (Professor Wright) dated 26 October 1893.
34. *Des Moines News*, 28 November 1893.
35. *Memphis Commercial*, 15 January 1894; *Appeal Avalanche*, 16 January 1894.
36. *Memphis Commercial*, 21 January 1894.
37. *Appeal Avalanche*, 21 January 1894.
38. *Appeal Avalanche*, 18 January 1894.
39. *Appeal Avalanche*, 20 January 1894.
40. *Appeal Avalanche*, 21 January 1894.
41. *New Discoveries*, p. 204. At the reception gath-

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erary because of two reasons; first, he came into an open clash with the orthodox Christians and became somewhat controversial; second, he won a large number of admirers and disciples, some of whom like Mary C. Funke and Christine Greenstidel (later Sister Christine) preserved the spirit of their master, 'as it poured forth in audible monologues.'[42] 'I can see him yet, as he stepped upon the platform, a regal, majestic figure, vital, forceful, dominant, and at the first sound of the wonderful voice — a voice all music — now like the plaintive minor strain of an Eolian harp, again deep, vibrant, resonant — there was a hush, a stillness that could almost be felt, and the vast audience breathed as one man.' This is how Mrs. Funke described her first impressions of the Swami after hearing him in Detroit.[43]

Miss Christine Greenstidel, who reluctantly set out one cold February night to listen to the Swami, 'found the touchstone for which (she) had searched so long'. The audience was spell-bound, she wrote, 'while he wove the fabric as glowing and full of colour as a beautiful Kashmir shawl. Now a thread of humour, now one of tragedy, many of serious thought, many of aspiration, of lofty idealism, of wisdom.... Those who came to the first lecture at the Unitarian Church came to the second and to the third, bringing others with them. "Come," they said, "hear this wonderful man. He is like no one we have ever heard", and they came until there was no place to hold them.'[44]

In his lecture at Mrs. Bagley's house (21 February), Swami Vivekananda criticized the Christian missionaries for their insular approach and outlook. 'With all your brags and boastings where has your Christianity succeeded without the sword? Show me one place in the whole world. One, I say,... I do not want two.' 'You are not Christians,' he thundered, 'No, as a nation you are not. Go back to Christ.... Yours is a religion preached in the name of luxury. What an irony of fate. Reverse this, if you want to live, reverse this.'[45] The audience was roused to absolute frenzy. Some ladies thronged around him to pay him respect and compliments. As an American Journal wrote: The Swami repaid their admiration by writing both 'religious and semi-sentimental verses' in their autograph books.[46]

Swami Vivekananda visited Lynn, a sea port in E. Massachusetts, at the invitation of Mrs. Francis W. Breed who was a prominent social leader. He delivered two lectures (17–18 April), first at the North Shore Club, of which Mrs. Breed was the President; and second, at the Oxford Hall. 'Shades of Parson Cooke defend us! And one of the addresses to the club composed wholly of women,' lampooned a local daily. 'How would that sound in Hindusthan? The world is making rapid strides.'[47]

At the invitation of Mrs. Arthur Smith and Dr. Guernsey, Swami Vivekananda went to New York and remained in the city from 24 April to 6 May 1894. He delivered lectures at Mrs. Smith's Conversation Circle and Miss Mary Phillips' residence. He also addressed a Vegetarian Club about which he wrote to Miss Isabelle McKindley: 'I have eaten a good

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ering, a woman insulted the Swami. Reporting this *The Detroit Free Press* of 23 February 1894 wrote: 'Before he ever addressed one word to the public here, a woman, be it said to her shame, took it upon herself to attack, and most unkindly denounce him to his face, in a house to which she was invited as a guest to meet him.'

42. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 8th edn., 1975), p. 80.
43. *Life*, p. 331.
44. *Reminiscences*, pp. 160–3.
45. *The Detroit Free Press*, 22 February 1894.
46. *Detroit Journal*, 23 February 1894.
47. *Lynn City Item*, 20 April 1894.

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slice of meat just now because in the evening I am going to speak in a vegetarian dinner.'[48] Later, in November 1894, he established a Vedanta society in the city which became very popular. Prominent among his admirers and disciples were the Guernseys with whom he lived for some time, Constance Town who has left interesting memoirs of the Swami, Miss Emma Thursby who later joined the Vedanta Society, and Josephine MacLeod (also known as Joe Joe and Tantine) who served the cause of her Master with remarkable loyalty and devotion.

Miss Sarah Farmer who met the Swami in New York invited him to attend the Greenacre Religious Conference in 1894. It was here that he held his first Vedanta classes under one of the tall Lysekloster pines (now famous as Swami's Pine).[49] While at Greenacre, Swami Vivekananda caught the fascination of a philanthropist, Mrs. Pratt of Kenilworth, who wanted to donate $ 500 for his future work; but he declined the offer.[50]

'I have been running all the time between Boston and New York, two great centres of this country, of which Boston may be called the brain and New York, the purse,' wrote Swami Vivekananda to G.G. Narasimhachariar (Director of Archaeological Survey, Government of Mysore).[51] Among those who invited the Swami to Boston were Julia Ward Howe, the President of New England Women Club. He delivered six lectures in the city (7–16 May), and made many acquaintances with 'the leaders of thought, action and fashion'. These were followed by a number of discourses on the Hindu morals, philosophy and mysticism as also on the position of Indian women. *The Northampton Daily Herald* (13 April 1894) reported that a prominent Boston society lady gave 'a novel entertainment' for Swami Vivekananda. She asked her guests to bring their most puzzling problems, whether of philosophy, science or religion. 'They came, they asked, they were answered and departed, saying "of a truth the half had not been told".'[52]

Swami Vivekananda addressed a women's club of Lawrence in the middle of May 1894. Around this time, he received an invitation from a rich lady of Swampscott, but he did not go. He, however, found time to visit Mrs. Ole Bull's house in Cambridge (2 October). Mrs. Bull, who was the wife of a famous Norwegian violinist, provided much financial help to the Swami when he established the Belur monastery. Swami Vivekananda called her Dhiramata (the steady mother).[53]

At the invitation of Mrs. Enoch Totten, Swami Vivekananda visited Washington where he delivered two lectures (22–23 October). Another set of seven lectures were given

48. *CW*, vol. 7, pp. 464; letter to McKindley dated 1 May 1894.
49. For Swami Vivekananda's description of the Greenacre Conference, see his letter to the Hale Sisters dated 31 July 1894: *CW*, vol. 6, pp. 259–62.
50. *CW*, vol. 8, p. 318; letter to the Hale sisters dated 11 August 1894.
51. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 64; letter dated 11 January 1895.
52. Swami Vivekananda once remarked that the American women indulged in too much 'talks and gossips', *CW*, vol. 8, p. 369. 'Of all, Boston is the worst. There the women are all faddists, all fickle, merely bent on following something new and strange.' *CW*, vol. 5, p. 413.
53. Swami Vivekananda's letters to Mrs. Ole Bull (Sara) show that he gave her the respect due to a mother. For example, he wrote (19 September 1894): 'A Hindu son never lends to his mother, but the mother has every right over the son.... I am very much offended at your offering to repay me the nasty few dollars. I can never repay my debts to you.' *CW*, vol. 6, p. 268.

In another letter he wrote (14 February 1895): 'Accept my heartfelt gratitude for your motherly advice. I hope I will be able to carry out them in life.' *CW*, vol. 6, p. 299.

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at Brooklyn (between 30 December 1894 and 8 April 1895) at the instance of Ethical Cultural Society. Of these, the lecture on 'Ideals of Womanhood: Hindu, Mohammedan and Christian' brought him into a clash with the Rama Bai circle of women, whose President, Mrs. James Mackeen started a tirade against the Swami in the Brooklyn Press. The issues at stake were: Whether widows were ill-treated in Hindu society or not? Did they inherit the property of their deceased husbands as claimed by the Swami or 'starve and drudge' as asserted by the Rama Bai Circle? The debate proved inconclusive.[54]

The commencement of Vedanta and Yoga classes in New York sometime in February 1895 set the Swami's work on organized lines. In this task he was greatly helped by Miss Phillips, Miss Thursby, Mrs. Ole Bull and Leon Landsberg. In the beginning there were only three or four students but the number grew with 'astonishing rapidity'. Sister Christine records that 'millionaires were glad to sit on the floor, literally at his feet'.[55] 'And those first classes!' reminisced Miss Waldo, 'how intensely interesting they were! Who that was privileged to attend them can ever forget them? The Swami, so dignified yet so simple, so gravely earnest, so eloquent, and the close rank of students...hanging breathless on his every word!'[56]

While these classes were in full swing, the Swami started another series of lectures at the house of one Miss Corbin. But he discontinued them because of her snobbery. 'Was it ever in the history of the world that any great work was done by the rich?' he wrote to Mrs. Ole Bull. 'It is the heart and the brain that do it ever and ever and not the purse.'[57] Among those who became seriously interested in the Swami's teachings were the MacLeod sisters, Miss Hamlin and Laura Glenn. The last among them took to sannyasa and acquired the ascetic title of Sister Devamata. Recalling the day she first heard her Master, she wrote: 'He began to speak; and memory, time, place, people, all melted away. Nothing was left but a voice ringing through the void.... He stood there — prophet of infinitude.'[58]

In the fist week of June 1895, Swami Vivekananda left for Perch along with Josephine MacLeod and her sister, William Sturges, to relax in the summer resort of Francis H. Legget. From MacLeod's reminiscences, we learn that the Swami prepared two beautiful birch bark books, written in Sanskrit and English, and presented them to her and Sturges.[59] Likewise, he sent a piece of bark to Miss Mary Hale of Chicago, inscribed with the words: 'This is the bark in which all holy writings are written in India.'[60]

At the invitation of Miss Dutcher, his New York student, Swami Vivekananda went to the Thousand Island Park (on the St. Lawrence river) and remained there from 18 June to 6 August 1895. Miss Dutcher constructed a special three-storeyed wing in her cottage to accommodate him and his disciples, which included among others, Miss S. Ellen Waldo, Miss Ruth Ellis, Miss Christine Greenstidel, Mrs. Mary C. Funke, Marie Louise, and Leon Landsberg. It was in this house that the immortal lines of the 'Song of the Sannyasin' were composed;[61] again it was here that the discourses later published as *Inspired Talks* were delivered to the chosen band of Americans.[62] The Swami initiated two of his disciples into sannyasa and five

54. See Satish K. Kapoor, 'Swami Vivekananda: A Study of His Sojourns and Impact on the West, 1893–1896' (Ph.D. Thesis, Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1980), pp. 378–93.
55. *Reminiscences*, p. 172.
56. *Reminiscences*, p. 125.
57. *CW*, vol. 6, pp. 301–02; letter to Mrs. Bull dated 21 March 1895.
58. *Reminiscences*, p. 133.
59. *Reminiscences*, p. 235.
60. *CW*, vol. 8, p. 340; letter to Miss Mary Hale dated 17 June 1895.
61. *CW*, vol. 4, pp. 392–5.
62. *CW*, vol. 7, pp. 1–104.

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others into the discipline of brahmacharya.

About the middle of August, the Swami left for Europe from where he returned in the first week of December 1895 to resume his work in America. Vedanta classes were again in full swing in New York. As before, he received a number of invitations to lecture at many places such as the Metaphysical Society in Brooklyn, the People's Church in New York, the Department of Philosophy, Harvard University, and the Twentieth Century Club in Boston; to mention only a few. In Chicago he held Yoga classes at the instance of one Miss Adams. The Swami revisited Europe during April–July and September–December 1896; thereafter he returned to India.

During his sojourns in America, Swami Vivekananda impressed a number of distinguished women. The famous opera singer Madame E. Calve was delighted to meet the Swami whom she described as 'a man who truly "walked with God", a noble being, a saint, a philosopher and a true friend'[63]. Mrs. Ella Wheeler Wilcox, one of the founders of the New Thought Movement in America regarded the Swami's teachings as an anodyne for despair and gloom.[64] Sarah Bernhardt, a well-known actress, sought an interview with the Swami, and expressed 'her admiration and intense interest in the sublime teachings of the philosophy he so eloquently and truly represented.'[65] Lucy Monroe, a seasoned journalist, held that he had given to Americans 'a new idea of Hindu civilization'[66]. Sara Bard Field (Mrs. Charles Erskine Scott Wood), a distinguished poetess, became an ardent follower of the Vedanta philosophy.[67]

The average American women vied with one another to have a clear glimpse of him, and if he shook hands with anyone she felt blessed. One such lady of Detroit did not wash her hands for three days, after experiencing the thrill of his touch.[68] 'Oh, he is like a lovely golden statue,' remarked a wealthy young lady after having his glimpse.[69] 'That man has given me eternal life. I never wish to hear him again,' said another.[70]

One may ask, what made Swami Vivekananda a celebrity among the American women — his shapely features, his sparkling eyes, his resonant voice or his gospel? Could this 'fascination' for the Swami be interpreted in Freudian terms that opposite sexes attracted each other? Of course not. The Swami's handsome appearance might have evoked the gamut of 'primary emotions' in some women but it would be ludicrous to suggest that everyone who went to his lecture had a depraved mind. The craze for the Swami was mainly due to what a psychologist would describe as the tendency to be attracted by the novel or the strange. Not all the women were seriously interested in Hinduism, but after listening to Swami Vivekananda they seemed to have developed some appreciation for the Oriental thought. If the 'pagan' was so learned, how recondite would be his faith which formed the fountain of his thought. Not surprisingly, some prominent women became his disciples.

How did Swami Vivekananda view the American women? He was impressed by their comely appearance, their sobriety, and the vitality of their person. 'In America, the best blood strains of Europe have blended and therefore the American women are very beautiful,' he wrote to Bhattacharya. 'Those emaciated Western women, looking like old

63. *Reminiscences*, p. 264.
64. *Life*, pp. 386–7.
65. *Life*, p. 350. See also Christopher Isherwood, ed., *Vedanta for the Western World* (London: Unwin Books, 3rd impression, 1963), pp. 186–9.
66. *The Critic*, 7 October 1893.
67. *New Discoveries*, pp. 213–14.
68. *New Discoveries*, pp. 213–14.
69. *Reminiscences*, p. 377.
70. *Reminiscences*, p. 244.

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dried-up fruit, whom you see in India, are English....'[71]

The Swami felt that the American women had taken great strides in improving their lot and seemed to be the 'most advanced in the world'[72]. They had an urge to learn, 'to know everything', and to progress in life. They were broadminded and liberal, and sympathized with every noble cause from whatever quarter it came.[73] 'How pure, independent, self-relying and kind-hearted' were they! he wondered.[74] When asked by a press reporter about his impressions of America, he unequivocally replied that he had a very high opinion about its women.[75]

In his view, the average American women was far more refined than the average American man. 'The men slave all their life for money, and the women snatch every opportunity to improve themselves....'[76] 'The men are grinding all day at their work and have very little leisure, whereas the women, by studying and teaching in the schools and colleges, have become highly learned.'[77]

The women represented the acme of American culture and infused vigour into every national activity.[78] They were the life and soul of America. 'All learning and culture are centred in them,' he wrote, 'The saying या श्री स्वयं सुकृतिनां भवनेषु "Who is the Goddess of Fortune herself in the families of the meritorious" (*Chandi*) — holds good in this country, while that other, अलक्ष्मी: पापात्मनां "The Goddess of ill-luck in the homes of the sinful" — applies to ours.'[79] Some of them were highly accomplished and 'well versed in science and philosophy'[80]. Their knowledge could put 'many a learned Professor to shame'[81].

Again he noted that it was possible to find a few 'well-educated' men in India who could match the profundity of their American counterparts, but the same was not true of Indian women. 'I have never seen women elsewhere as cultured and educated as they are here,' he wrote[82]. The Swami asked his disciple Alasinga to work for the amelioration of Indian women on the American model. 'Every American woman has far better education than can be conceived by the majority of Hindu women. Why cannot we have the same education?'[83]

Like Tocqueville, the Swami was astonished by the skill and confidence of American women whom he regarded as primarily responsible for the prosperity and strength of American civilization.[84] 'Whichever side you turn your eyes in America, you see the power and influence of women,' he said.[85] In his view, nowhere in the world were women so free, prosperous, privileged and powerful as in America. They were slowly taking 'everything into their hands'[86]. 'Oh, how free they are!' he wrote to Haripada Mitra. 'It is they who control social and civic duties.' Comparing them to Indian women he wrote in utter disgust: 'And in our country women cannot be safely allowed to walk in the streets!'[87]

Swami Vivekananda praised America — 'Motherland of liberty' — for providing ample opportunities to women for their all-round growth. The Americans, he said, were only one-twentieth of the world population.

71. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 472.
72. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 22.
73. *CW*, vol. 6, p. 248.
74. *CW*, vol. 6, p. 252.
75. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 183.
76. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 22.
77. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 125.
78. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 25.
79. *CW*, vol. 6, pp. 252–3.
80. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 125.
81. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 475.
82. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 25.
83. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 24.
84. See Henry Ford Parks, *The United States of America: A History* (Calcutta: Scientific Book Agency, 3rd edn., 1968), p. 256.
85. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 125.
86. *CW*, vol. 4, p. 361.
87. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 25.

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But they controlled about one-sixth of its wealth.[88] Why? Because they gave due respect to women and labourers. The Americans had their faults too, but which race did not have them. 'Asia laid the germs of civilization, Europe developed man, and America is developing woman and the masses.'[89]

When Swami Vivekananda apotheosised the American women describing some of them as 'pure as the icicle on Diana's temple'[90], he was aware that this was only half the truth. After all America was not inhabited by only 'wingless angels in the shape of women. There is good and bad everywhere. ...but a nation is not to be judged by its weaklings called the wicked ... but by the good, the noble and the pure.'[91]

What irked Swami Vivekananda was the fact that more and more women were discarding their puritan heritage and flaunting the standards of morality by wearing 'a kind of low-cut gown' and showing off their bodies 'above the waist'[92]. 'The girls of India would die,' he once remarked, 'if they, like American girls, were obliged to expose half their bodies to the vulgar gaze of young men.'[93] However, like Tocqueville, he felt that the American women were far more chaste than the European.[94]

Since the last century, the American women have been too much fashion-conscious. A young lady once told Emerson that the sense of being perfectly well-dressed gave her a feeling of inward tranquillity which religion was powerless to bestow.[95] Alluding to this trend, Swami Vivekananda remarked that the women spent a lot of time to 'take care of their beauty'[96]. There was no end to the 'cleaning and embellishing' of the body[97] 'a thousand instruments for paring nails, ten thousand for hair-cutting and who can count the varieties of dress and toilet and perfumery?'[98] Did Thorstein Veblen take a cue from the Swami's observation when he observed that the modern women were a prime exhibit of 'conspicuous waste'[99]?

Swami Vivekananda bemoaned the growing epicurean, individualistic and sensualistic tendencies in the American women who were fast becoming the devotees of 'novels and balls'[100]. What was particularly annoying was the sense of loneliness, the diminishing parental control over children and the enormous freedom enjoyed by youngsters in matters of sex and marriage. It would be worthwhile mentioning that the romantic ideal came into the Western tradition from the middle ages through 'the medieval courts of love', the love-lyrics of Troubadours and Minnesingers and the Tristram Iseult story.[101] The Swami did not mince words when he said that the American women were 'very sentimental' and had 'a mania for romance'[102]. It appears that some women must have made overtures to the Swami, for he wrote to Bhattacharya, that even though he was closely associated with them, he preferred to be addressed as 'father' or 'brother'. 'They show me great respect.... I do not allow them to come near me with any other feeling, and gradually they have all been straightened out.'[103]

'[In India,] the earth is soaked sometimes with widows' tears; there in the West, the air

88. *CW*, vol. 4, p. 361.
89. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 22.
90. *CW*, vol. 6, p. 248.
91. *CW*, vol. 6, p. 249.
92. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 471.
93. *Detroit Evening News*, 25 March 1894.
94. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 472. For Tocqueville's view see Max Lerner, *America As A Civilization* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1957), vol. 2, p. 671.
95. *America As A Civilization*, p. 649.
96. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 474.
97. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 471.
98. *CW*, vol. 6, pp. 271–2.
99. For Veblen's view see *America As A Civilization*, p. 647.
100. *CW*, vol. 8, p. 219.
101. *America As A Civilization*, p. 583.
102. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 474.
103. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 474.

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is rent with the sighs of the unmarried.'[104] This is how Swami Vivekananda summed up the problems of marriage in the two continents. He observed that the American girls enjoyed the freedom to choose their own husbands unlike their Indian counterparts who depended on their parents for suitable matches. Wherever the American girls went — to a ball or a fashion show, a musical concert or a park, a sea-beach, or a club — they had usually one objective in mind — to capture husbands. They mixed up too much with the boys and flirted with them. But courtship did not always lead to marriage. 'After many efforts of this kind, a girl succeeds in capturing a boy,' he wrote.[105] Likewise, before a young lad gets married, 'he has courted two hundred women'[106]. It was not gallantry but immorality.

The rich and the beautiful girls, however, had a better chance in matrimonial matters. There were some who believed that marriage was not an indispensable institution since it did not usually end in love but divorce. 'There is no use in marrying,' they said, 'If we truly fall in love, then we shall marry; otherwise, we shall earn and meet our own expenses.'[107] Another interesting thing was that men visited their in-laws quite often, but rarely went to their own parents. A popular American quote of the time said:

> Son is son till he gets a wife;
> The daughter is daughter all her life.[108]

The Swami further observed that the average American woman had no attraction for the European princes who, in their state of poverty, visited the country to seduce young girls. Even those who fell for their titles did not like to go to Europe because of the fear that they might become slaves to their husbands like the European wives. The position was quite the opposite in America where 'in everything the men had to say "Yes dear"; otherwise, the wives lose face before people,' he said.[109]

For one reason or the other, Swami Vivekananda had a very poor opinion about the church women of America. In his view, they were steeped in vice and sunk in iniquity. This is how he described their antecedents: 'When a woman tries her best to find a husband, she goes to all the fashionable seaside resorts and tries all sorts of tricks to catch a man. When she fails in her attempts, she becomes, what they call in America, an "old maid", and joins the Church.... Between them and the priests they make hell of earth and make a mess of religion.' These remarks were not relished by many Christian missionaries both in America and India, who, in turn, maligned him in many ways.[110] Swami Vivekananda was distressed by the fact that although the American women enjoyed equal freedom with men to compete in all walks of life yet she continued to live in the traditional patriarchal order characterized by 'masculine power and standards'. While in India, the woman was looked upon as a Mother — the visible manifestation of God — in America she was seen as a wife, a mere plaything.[111] The Swami had a clip at American men when he said that they professed to 'worship

104. *CW*, vol. 3, p. 213.
105. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 473. This was in sharp contrast to what Swami Vivekananda wrote in the same letter to Bhattacharya (5 September 1894): 'I have not as yet seen a single unchaste girl among the unmarried. It is either a widow or a married woman who turns unchaste. The unmarried girls are exceedingly good because their future is bright.' *CW*, vol. 7, p. 474.
106. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 412.
107. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 473.
108. *CW*, vol. 6, p. 269.
109. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 474.
110. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 211. For the Swami's reaction to missionary criticism see his letter to Miss Mary Hale dated 9 July 1897, *CW*, vol. 5, pp. 134–6.
111. *Detroit Free Press*, 25 March 1894; *Detroit Evening News*, 25 March 1894.

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woman' but in fact worshipped 'youth and beauty'. They never fell in love with 'wrinkles and grey hair'[112]. 'Your men bow low and offer a chair, but in another breath they offer compliments. They say, "Oh madam, how beautiful are your eyes!" What right have they to do this? How dare a man venture so far, and how can you women permit it?' he asked.[113]

Swami Vivekananda felt that the feverish competition between the opposite sexes had elbowed out tenderness from human relations and created an emotional crisis which made women feel lonely, bored and monotonous. Some of them sought refuge in libertinism and became members of amoral clubs or societies, specializing in what Martha Wolfenstein would describe as 'fun morality'. Such enjoyment led to moral depravity and weakened the human spirit; it was like 'the million-headed serpent that we must tread under foot'[114]. Let the women distinguish between the good and the pleasant, the eternal and the ephemeral, the spiritual and the sensual. Only then they would be mentally at peace. Let them rise above sex-feelings and cultivate the qualities of chastity and continence.[115] Is there any sex distinction in the Atman (Self)?' he asked. 'Out with the differentiation between man and woman — all is Atman! Give up the identification with the body, and stand up!'[116] In a lecture in New York, he admonished: 'We should not think that we are men and women but only that we are human beings, born to cherish and to help one another.'[117] To Miss Mary Hale of Chicago he wrote: 'Give up the idea of sex and possessions. ...as these fall off, the eyes open to spiritual vision.'[118]

Swami Vivekananda's contact with the American women provided the leaven which set into motion the process of the spread of Hindu thought in America. His message caused 'the frivolous society woman to pause and think' and imbued 'the wife and mother, the husband and father, with a larger and holier comprehension of duty'[119]. India gave birth to the Swami. America discovered him. The American women took him up and made him a celebrity. The Swami reciprocated by paying glowing tributes to both. He said: 'The United States has inspired me with hopes for great possibilities in the future, but our destiny, as that of the world rests not in the law-makers of today, but in the women.'[120] ❐

112. *Detroit Tribune*, 1 April 1894.
113. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 412.
114. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 15.
115. Patanjali says: 'ब्रह्मचर्यप्रतिष्ठायां वीर्यलाभः। By being established in continence, one gains spiritual energy.' *Yoga Sutras*, II, 38.

The Swami often exhorted his disciples to follow this well-known aphorism. 'Don't you see there is a reason why chastity is insisted on in all monastic orders?' he would tell his disciples. 'The Roman Catholic Church has produced great saints, St. Francis of Assisi, Ignatius Loyola, St. Teresa, the two Catherines, and many others. The Protestant Church has produced no one of spiritual rank equal to them. There is a connection between great spirituality and chastity. The explanation is that these men and women have through prayer and meditation transmuted the most powerful force in the body into spiritual energy. In India this is well understood, and yogis do it consciously.' *Reminiscences*, pp. 182–3.

116. *CW*, vol. 6, p. 273.
117. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 412.
118. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 138.
119. *Life*, p. 387.
120. *CW*, vol. 3, p. 510.

> Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are as capable of doing it as any in the world.
>
> —*Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 135

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India — What She Stands For

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A Professor in the Department of Philosophy, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Ettumanoor, Kerala, the learned author highlights the philosophical and religious contributions made by India to humanity. Naturally, the author also goes into the other aspects of human life which received the blessings of the spiritual and philosophical insight of the ancient seers.

The clarion call of India is indeed an ode on the immortality of man. Hearken to the magnificent declaration of the Upanishads: *'Amṛtasya Putrāḥ'* (Ye, Children of Immortal Bliss, *Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad*, II.5). Man is not what he appears to be — a tiny drop of dew on a shivering blade of grass. Indubiously did India declare:

O mind, you do not know how to farm!
Fallow lies the field of your life.
If you had only worked it well,
How rich a harvest you might reap!...

This couplet epitomizes the Indian ethos. Life, to the Indian, is not a tale told by an idiot signifying nothing; it is one of many links in the chain beginning with a beginningless past but terminable; a note among many in the music of Providence. A vision of life, grand in contour, a mission of action, grandiose in content, is the heritage of Hindu India.

How did this vision dawn on the Indian mind? Through introspection. By meditation, pure and simple. The Indians of yore were bold thinkers. They were bold and sincere doubters too! Even the concluding stanza of the *Nāsadīya Sūktam*, which is a philosophical marvel, is surcharged with scepticism. Look at its ending, as translated by Max Muller (*Ṛg-Veda*, X.129.7):

...Whether He made it
Or did not make it
...He forsooth knows
Or does even He not know?

Scepticism, the sages of India believed, is the spring-board of sound and salutary thought. Truth, if it be the ultimate Truth, withstands every test of reason. An ancient anthem (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*,1.2.21) speaks out this idea, *'Mad-anyo jñātumarhati'* (Who else than I shall know It?) Not the doles but the Whole was what the ancients craved for. For they had realized (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 7.23.1) that the Whole is hedonic, while the part is pathogenic: *'Yo vai bhūmā tat sukham, Nālpe sukhamasti.'* Seldom did they seek favours with suppliant knees. The core of Indian thought was not supplication. It was inquiry. Long before Descartes, the French mathematician-cum-philosopher, enunciated the dictum, 'cogito ergo sum' (I think, therefore I exist), the Indian rishi had realized that thought is existence and existence sans thought is impotence. Impelled by an insatiable enquiry and compelled by climatic dictates, soothed by social security and decreed by divine dispensation, the Indian was a thinker par excellence. India thought, and so she survived. She lived with obdurate faith and steadfast hope, as a result of unruffled thinking.

The thoughtful soul of India, to solitude retired, not merely after the day's toil, but after all the social callings were discharged. There, far from the maddening cacophony of the madding crowds and the ignoble strife of the masses, in constant communion with Nature and caressed by Her, the cognitive and the cogitative Indian mind reflected on life in its entirety. The finale is the apotheosis of man, the apparent mortal. Yea, the mighty master that leads the vast sublime symphony of the starry heavens and the little master monitoring the inner springs of man through

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moral imperatives are equated, *'Tat tvam asi'*, (That thou art, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*). The *Muṇḍakopaniṣad* (III.i.1), brings out the identity of God and man in a beautiful imagery, which runs as under:

> Like two birds of golden plumage,
> companions inseparable
> Perched on the boughs of the self-same tree
> Are the two beings,
> one hugs the trunk and feasts on
> The fruits from the branches,
> the other detachedly gazes.

Thus, the little self within and the great Self without are established to be homogeneous.

What a boldness! This wonderful discovery, it is said, set Immanuel Kant thinking, 'Have they or have they not a common source or origin?' This persistent thought resulted in the publication of his *Critiques*. There was a corollary too — the deification of the tiniest particle of matter. The philosophers of India discovered the principle of utter simplicity ubiquitous in Nature. Sri Sankaracharya christened it (Sankara Bhashya, *Brahma Sūtras*, 3.2.17) *'Upaśānto'yamātmā'* (the Silence Divine). Centuries had to elapse before the Jewish Rabbi Maimonides exhorted his disciples, 'Know Him in Silence'.

The unity of all existence, consequent upon the comprehensive vision of evolution, with man as the Taj Mahal of creation, lineates the legacy of India. What is in the macrocosm is in the microcosm also, and vice-versa, India proclaimed. Everything in this Universe is subject to the same inexorable *Ṛta* (Cosmic Order) and is governed, as far as human understanding permits, by the infallible law of Karma with its concomitant process called metempsychosis or transmigration. The dictates of the law of Karma are direct and definite. 'Man, you are the maker of what you are. You yourself are your friend and foe.' Prejudices apart, this theory provides a plausible explanation to the woe and weal of man and his tribe. In parenthesis it may be noted that Pythagoras, the Greek mathematician, Hillel, the Jewish rabbi, and Origon, the Christian theologian, had no qualms in accepting this doctrine, braving even the risk of rustication.

The Upanishads unequivocally utter: *'Sarvaṁ khalvidaṁ Brahma'* (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, III.14.1), *'Īśā vāsyamidaṁ sarvam'* (*Īśa Upaniṣad*, 1), *'Pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam'* (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, Invocation), *'Puruṣa evedaṁ sarvam'*, (*Muṇḍakopaniṣad*, II.1.10) ('All here is Brahman', 'All here is donned by divinity', 'That is Whole, so is this', 'The Lord permeates everything'). To use an anachronism, the Indians were monists long before Baruch Spinoza, and evolutionists much before Charles Darwin. Her finding, *'Satyam, Śivam, Sundaram'* (Truth, Order, Beauty) as crystallized in the Upanishads is a prime mover towards positive philosophy and optimistic thought. The Upanishads are the crest-jewel of Indian thought and verily the wonderful product of excellent human minds. Schopenhauer, the German philosopher, extolled the Upanishads as the most beneficial study for man, and the solace of his life and death.

Knowledge, India declared is the key to immortality: *'Vidyayāmṛtamaśnute'*. So runs rhyme 11 of the *Īśa Upaniṣad*. Hence the emphasis on education, not only spiritual but secular too. For India, the world and its values were not to be despised or disparaged. They are truths, inviolable and immutable indeed, in the physical plane.

It is a wonder of history that centuries before the Christian era, nay, long before the advent of Moses, the first prophet of Israel, when the forefathers of the Anglo-Saxon races were living in caves and forests, eating raw meat, putting on animal hides and tattooing their bodies — in that remote antiquity—, the dawn of civilization had broken upon the horizon of India. Reassured by the researches and buttressed by the verdicts of history, Prof. Max Muller in a moment of rhapsody remarked, 'Whatever sphere of the human mind you may select for your special study, whether it is language or religion, mythology or philosophy, whether it be laws or customs, science or art, you have to go to India, whether you like it or not'. Incensed by an

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intense longing for knowledge and guided by an unswerving love for truth, the dons of India discovered many a natural law and explained it without fear of persecution or ostracism. The ghost of Bruno or John Huss does not haunt the land of India. Countries that came into contact with our motherland did acknowledge her legacy and they moulded their life after Indian ideas. For instance, geometry, first invented in India from the Vedic dimensions regarding the structure of the sacrificial hearths, was accepted and propagated in the Pythagorean academies of the Hellenic world. It is quite true that the world owes decimal notation to India. Arithmetic would have been well nigh impossible in the absence of this system. It was the Indian genius that gave to the West *Bījagaṇita*, through the Arabs who called it Algebra. As for the Arabs, mathematics was a *Hindusat*, or Indian art. The *Jewish Encyclopaedia* in its 12th volume, page 689, states that the theory that the earth is a sphere and it rotates in its own axis was known to Varahamihira and other Indian astronomers much before Copernicus the Pole published the theory and thereby won immortal fame. Before the Christian boy Newton was born in England, Aryabhatta had discovered the law of gravitation. In the backdrop of this, can the couplet

> Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in darkness
> God said, 'Let Newton be', and all was light

which Alexander Pope, the English poet, wrote as an encomium to Newton, stand the test of truth? How cheering it is to know that Kanada had conceived of atoms and molecules even before Empedocles and Democritus of Greece had dared to do so. Undoubtedly, the *Pañcatantra* and the *Hitopadeśa* furnished the foundation for *Aesop's Fables*. Bar Hebrews, the scion of the Syrian Christian Church, based his *Laughable Stories* mainly on the stories of the *Pañcatantra*. Sir Edwin Arnold translated the *Hitopadeśa* into English under the caption *The Book of Good Counsels*. Harun-al-Rashid, the celebrated Caliph of Baghdad, rendered into Arabic Charaka's and Susruta's medical treatises, the *materia medica* of India. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of Chandragupta, in the 4th Century BC testified that there existed among the Hindus, various kinds of schools suited to the different castes. The sage Patanjali, the exponent of the *Yoga-Sūtras*, speaks of *'jātyantara pariṇāma'* (IV.2), meaning 'transformation of one genus of species into another'. The catalogue of credits cannot be exhausted.

Despite this long list of laurels, India's ethos is not materialistic like that of modern Europe. Nor is it intellectual as that of ancient Athens. Essentially and eminently India is spiritual. The superiority of spirit over matter and mind has been the basis of Indian thought. But mark! While spirit is described (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, II.1.20) as *'Satyasya satyam'*, matter is designated *'Satyam'*. To use an analogy, spirit is the *primus interpares*, the first among the equals. Why this epithet spiritual? Ostensibly because India's *elan vital* or vital energy was directed to the eternal spirit. This eternal entity, the subtle spirit, the Indian seers realized, was enveloped by mind and encased in matter, less subtle and more gross than the spirit. Nevertheless, as a sequel to the grand vision of unity which in essence is what spirituality signifies and which ancient India was heir to, there was no non-alignment among the trio: matter, mind and spirit. Inebriated by the spirit, no Indian ever exclaimed wittingly 'no matter, never mind'. Each, India declared, has its appropriate place in the evolutionary spectrum. If there is any problem, it is a problem of proportion only.

The social system of India is built upon this solidarity of spirituality. Her concept *'Vasudhaivakuṭumbakam'* (the world as one family) eloquently bespeaks it. Her philosophy of life, propped up by the principles of *Dharma, Artha, Kāma* and *Mokṣa*, collectively called the *Caturvidha Puruṣārtha* (the four goals of man), formulates it. We may say that this philosophy is as a buckle that binds, a hyphen that joins, the terrestrial and the celestial. Earth and heaven are linked in this grand design. India's polity with *Dharma* as the loadstone is an appendix to spirituality. Her

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religion is a spring for the sprouting of the spiritual consciousness in man. Indian art and literature have the same motif. No wonder, Wagner fell under the magic spell of India, and his music, produced after the Indian ideals of spirituality, still remains beyond the pale of European comprehension. Yes, the lines of Rudyard Kipling, the Indian-born English poet,

> The East is East and the West is West
> The twain shall never meet,

ring in our ears even now. Indian jurisprudence is tempered by the milk of spirituality. It unequivocally vouched that whatever rights inhere in man exist in woman too. The code of Manu is more candid on this. He decreed that a woman's body is so sacred that it should not be struck even with a feather or flower. Further on, he instructs, where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased, but where they are dishonoured, no ritual shall yield rewards. Instances galore where women acted as arbitrators on philosophical polemics. How livening is the Hindu concept of marriage! It is not merely a union of blood with blood, but of spirit with spirit. For a Hindu husband, a wife is his bosom friend, a companion in solitude, a father in advice, a mother in all seasons of distress and an oasis in life's wilderness. India's concept of *Ardhanārīśvara* is the antidote to the havoc wrought by the myth of the creation of woman from the rib of Adam, the first man. No story of man's first disobedience and fall due to his fascination for the female was ever spun by India, for the very shame of derogation. The underlying philosophy of the Tantric system is an eloquent exposition on the divinity of woman. Here, in this system, the veneration of women verges on adoration. The Unmanifest, which manifests itself as Primordial Power, is recognized as a female — the 'Mother Goddess'.

The ancient vision that the spirit (or noumenon, a word from Immanuel Kant) pervades everywhere, led the Indian mind to sublimate everything. No anathema, no condemnation, no damnation. This world with all its trials, tribulations and even transitoriness is suspended on or supported in the Eternal, which is all Bliss. The Absolute is not only transcendental, it is immanent too. The greatest blasphemy, India decreed, is to call oneself or one's brother a sinner. In the Indian liturgy, there is no concept of sin and its sequel — the contrite heart. Instead there is only error, which can be corrected by a little determined effort of will. Pessimism has no permanent place in the make up of the Indian mind. True, pessimism did spread its tentacles to stifle the soul of India in its infancy. But without avail. Soon did Vedanta give out its roar proclaiming the divinity of man, and with its infallible logic rescued and redeemed the Indian mind from the pitfalls of pessimism and put it back on the path of spiritual quest. The ascent into Godhead, a consummation well within man's grasp, has ever been India's watchword. This assertion may be anything, but certainly not pessimism. Even Buddha who started his life as if bitten by the bug of pessimism, eventually landed on the safe and sure shores of optimism. It is well to remember that even while reacting to the ridiculous rites and redundant rituals, Buddha betrayed the influence of the Upanishadic doctrine of the divinity of man. Let us fasten our minds to Gautama's four noble truths, called *'Ārya Caturvāṇi'* in ancient Pali. They summarize what India stands for and stood by, for the transfiguration of man. 'There is misery; there is a cause for it; misery can be ended; there is a way to end it.' These — a statement of relative truths and a way to the transcendental Truth — can hardly be called a depressing or negative or pessimistic theory of existence. Negation of life has never been the philosophy of India. *'Jijīviṣet śataṁ samāḥ'* (One should wish to live a hundred years) instructs the *Īśa Upaniṣad, śloka* 2. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* (the Song Celestial) taking the thread from the seers of the Upanishads, conceived of and brought out the *'Sthitaprajña'*. Not the hesitation of Hamlet, but the alacrity of Othello is what Hindu India has upheld always. No more lotus eating; put a stop to star gazing.

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The *Gītā* admonished: incessant action, with devotion but without yearning for the fruit thereof, is to be extolled and exemplified. *Tapas, abhī* and *śraddha* (austerity, fearlessness and faith) when combined, evolve the man of equipoise or equanimity, the man of resolute mind. Acting, he experiences; experiencing, he acts. No hiatus between here and hereafter. A still joy of self-conquest, a serene joy of inner peace, and a sublime joy of supreme Self fills the heart of one who imbibes the spirit of 'the Song Celestial.' Among all sacrifices made in the service of the Lord, know that it is equanimity of the soul that is the finest and fittest offering. Equanimity is sweet to taste, and with a heavenly touch transforms everything into ambrosia. Equanimity invigorates the intellect and provides the mind with magnetic potency. It colours the fabric of man even as sunlight fills the vaults of the heaven. These teachings of the *Gītā*, the cream of the Upanishads and the homilies of the *Mahābhārata*, verily the encyclopaedia on life, will ever be the signposts for man in his odyssey here and excursion hereafter.

Happiness, the prime pursuit of man, the sages said, lies not in material wealth or physical welfare. True, they have their relative values and hence to be acquired as conditions. Penury and privation will scuttle or strangulate man's endeavour to attain Godhead. *'Bhubhukṣuḥ kiṁ na karoti pāpam'* (What heinous crimes shall not the man in the pangs of hunger perpetrate?) So is a good physique, a first and an essential condition for spiritual success, *'Śarīramādyaṁ khalu dharma sādhanam'* (*Kumāra Sambhavam*, V.33). Corporal mortification, the seers of yore asserted, stems from cold, cruel perversity. However, they hastened to warn that the end of the mortal frame of man is, like unto all, lo! a handful of ashes to be gathered in an urn. Likewise they averred that man does not get gratification from wealth alone, *'Na vittena tarpaṇīyo manuṣyaḥ'* (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.1.27). Stark naked reality! Hence, man must not be tied down to these conditions which are essentially ephemeral and certainly chimerical. Nonetheless, the Indian mind did not rest content after pronouncing these judgements. Their incisiveness drove them on to detect the fountainhead of happiness. To their utter dismay and disappointment they realized that words and the mind recoil from Reality, baffled in their quest. Daringly, they dived deep into the very substratum of their being. Soon, these sages hit at the core, the Atman or Self. *'Vedāhametaṁ puruṣaṁ mahāntam'* (I have known the Great One, *Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad*, III.8), solemnly they revealed. This Self is the perennial source of perpetual felicity, they discovered. 'The Kingdom of God is in you and within you', as the Nazarene was to proclaim later. *'Āvṛtta cakṣuḥ'* (vision turned inward, *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, II.1.1), they directed. Thus shall man reap the dividend of this idyllic bliss. This is no mere speculation, no conjecture. It is experience emanating from the direct perception of Truth. This is true religion. Religion, India reiterates, is realization. It is something to be lived and experienced. Experience the Self, the Reality, and be thou the eternal and everlasting Emperor of emperors.

An anecdote, from the annals of Archimedes, the scientist of Syracuse: After the invention of the principle of the lever, he boasted. 'Show me a fulcrum, and I shall lift the earth'. Poor Archimedes had to moan and groan for want of a fulcrum. The Indian sage quipped, 'Man, the fulcrum is the Self in you; fear It not; catch hold of It. Like the staff of Moses, which was a serpent till he courageously caught hold of it, the Self will lead you on to the promised land.' Not the savant or the scholar, but the simple and selfless, is the really religious. Not rhetoric, but renunciation, that is the stamp of religion. Renunciation not of wealth or the wherewithal, but of the ego. The obliteration of the 'I' consciousness. An attitude of *'Idaṁ na mama'* (This is not mine). This is the summum bonum of religion. Dogmas and doctrines are only the formats. Not by fleeing from life, which indeed one cannot, but by the detached living of life only, does man inherit happi-

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ness, be it in the household or in the hermitage, or in caves. Man, forget not in your haste that you have obligations to fulfil as a student and a householder, though a few may have transcended all such obligations, *'brahmacaryādeva pravrajet, gṛhādvā vanādvā'*. Life must be lived, and its vanity understood before it is surpassed. Be in the world; but be not of the world, and then behold the whole. Thus shall you attain the Absolute, the Satchidananda.

Sages and saints of India, from the hoary past to Sri Ramakrishna, testify that Truth is not monofaceted. Sri Ramakrishna, the solitary soul who stirred the soul of India from her slumber, realized during his life span of fifty years what the Indian mind had attained in fifty centuries. The seer of the *Ṛg-veda* had sung in the distant past that verily Truth has multitudinous manifestations, *'Ekaṁ sat viprā bahudhā vadanti'* (Truth is one; the knowers call It by different names, I.164.46). The truth also is that many are the ways to that one Truth, sternly did India proclaim. Wonderful catholicity! The parable of the Paramahamsa of Bengal declares: 'Many are the paths that lead to Kalighat, where the temple of Mother Kali is housed. Even so, umpteen are the ways to God, the One without a second. The colours of the cows are different, but that of their milk is always white.' Likewise, the externalities of religion may differ, but the essence is the same. Hence, no sanction is accorded by the Indian for religious wars, genocides or proselytization.

This latitudinous attitude brought in its train the spirit of toleration, accommodation, and acceptance. Different and divergent faiths and beliefs sprang up from the soil of India, not to blush unseen, but to blossom forth. While this is really the recognition of the principle of secularism, the charlatan jeered and called it polytheism! But the corrective came from the studies of Max Muller — 'henotheism' and not polytheism, he clarified. Behind the various forms of deities is the Eternal, Invisible, Indivisible — That which defies definition, the German indologist cleared. He then cheered the mechanism of the Indian mind. Refutation of the allegation that India's philosophy is pantheistic (all-God theory) came from Krauss. He asserted that it is 'pan-en-theistic' (all *in* God) and not pantheistic. 'With malice towards none, but with charity towards all', has been the shibboleth of India, down through the ages. Naturally, India has been a haven to religions of indigenous and exotic origin. Steadfast thou should be, but eschew bigotry, reminds India. Procrustean methods and proselytism are two devices of detestation to the pious of this land. Let religious pluralism prevail, preached the prophets of our motherland. Never has India been guilty of the inequities of inquisition, pogroms, or burnings at the stake. Therefore, India has a clean conscience to her credit. The nightmare of nemesis haunts her not. No need for the perfumes of Arabia to cleanse her hands. As water was turned into wine by the look of Jesus Christ, or as everything was transformed into gold at the mere touch of Midas, so has India's spiritual song transformed everything, not to wine, not to gold, but to God.

Therefore, let us offer salutations to the motherland *'Namaste sadā vatsale mātṛbhūmi'*. Thou art an enigma or a will o' the wisp to the inhospitable and the indolent. But to the straightforward and the sympathetic, thou, like a loving mother, bestows the bounty of understanding. We must have the conviction that this is the land of the gods in the garb of mortals. This is no fantasy or figment of fancy. Recall what is inscribed in *The Bible of Humanity* authored by the French philosopher Michlet, and sing with him in chorus, 'Athens and Greece failed to quench my thirst. The springs of Syria are all dried up. I turned to the land of the Himalayas. It appeared to me as the abode of the celestials'. Like him we also shall swallow the nectar or sip the elixir of life from the gushes of the Ganges.

Hence, *'Uttiṣṭhata, jāgrata, prāpya varān nibodhata'*, Arise, awake and proceed to the presence of a preceptor to be instructed in Wisdom (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.3.14). That is India ☐

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Community Development

SWAMI TATTWAJNANANANDA

The author, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, is the Principal of the Community Polytechnic, Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, West Bengal.

In this article, highly relevant especially for West Bengal, the learned author points out that even fifty years after independence we are far away from self rule. What are the problems that we have failed to address effectively? — undernourishment, illiteracy, deprivation of basic needs like shelter, supply of safe drinking water, proper sanitation, adequate health-care, etc. The solution — strong determination and sustained effort in line with well-planned work-schedule. The author proceeds to show how this is to be carried out.

Preamble

We recently celebrated the Golden Jubilee of Indian Independence and are now nearing the dawn of the 21st Century.Though we have been able to get a government led by elected representatives of our own people, we are still far away from self rule — in the true sense of the term — which makes democracy work.

In the mean time India has progressed in many technical areas but the condition of the masses of the country has not improved much. Most of the people who belong to rural sector are still below the poverty line, bearing all unfortunate consequences: undernourishment, illiteracy, deprivation of basic needs like shelter, safe drinking water, proper sanitation, health-care — in spite of more than half a dozen National Five Year Plans.

In West Bengal, the picture is even more dismal. It is more disheartening because of the fact that this State once enjoyed a leading position among many others in India in pre-independence days. Other states in the North, North-West and Western part of the country have advanced far ahead of West Bengal in every respect and in every aspect of progress. Not to talk of industrialization, the very State of West Bengal, which a few decades ago used to be credited as one of the pioneering states in the arena of education, has been demoted to almost the lowest position among all other states of India.

But West Bengal has to rise again not only for the Bengalees but for the sake of the whole country considering its geographical position, historical background and national commitment.

The reasons behind the present state of affairs are not difficult to ascertain. The partition of Bengal (1947) has forced millions of inhabitants of the eastern part of Bengal to leave their ancestral homes and flock in the newly formed small state named West Bengal. This built up immense pressure on the economy, culture and even morality of the people. The wrongly selected political ideology nourished by the people for last two decades has made the situation worse. Through wrong interpretation and advocation of the doctrine of communism at the crucial juncture of history, the ruling party of the state for the last two decades has degenerated the work-culture, education and attitude towards the Nation as a whole in West Bengal.

Industrialists have become scared of investing their capital in this state, on account of poor work-culture: job security minus accountability, unions, strike, 'go slow' tactics, organized bribes, gherao, to mention a few.

The standard of education has lowered due to which youths passing out from educational institutions have become incapable of taking up any responsible assignment, not to

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talk of facing competitive examinations at national level.

For over last two decades, the leaders of the state have been raising slogans against the Central Government on the latter's alleged apathy to this state. Now the situation has worsened to a level from which West Bengal can be saved only with strong determination and sustained effort in line with well-planned work-schedule.

For about two hundred years Bengal thrived on Calcutta-based industry and trade. Calcutta was the Capital of India for about a century. After India gained Independence at the price of partition of the country, the status of Calcutta changed abruptly. The city no longer was the Eastern Gate of the Sub-Continent; Chittagong of Bangladesh and Paradeep of Orissa robbed the importance and glory of Calcutta and thereby of West Bengal which depended solely on the city for its existence. Calcutta until recently did not have a separate international airport either. Importance of Calcutta depended on jute based industries and the railways. After partition, a major part of jute producing land has gone to erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) while substitutes of jute appeared as strong competitors, and most of the railway workshops have been set up at places far away from Calcutta.

After the emergence of the State of West Bengal in Independent India, all state level industrial and development projects were centred around Calcutta (except for a Steel Plant at Durgapur) and virtually Calcutta has been looked after and treated by leaders as the State itself. The technical and industrial infrastructure developed by the Britishers for their own interest however has been, in the name of trade-unionism, shattered down by irresponsible leaders without any visionary quality. The incessant influx of refugees from East Pakistan, who were basically agriculture-based people without any technical skill or attitude, could contribute nothing positive towards the growth or even meeting the increasing demand of industrial growth in the country after independence, but did contribute negatively on account of over-crowding. Middle class people educated their offsprings for white-collar jobs quite in contrast to the activities of the refugees from West Pakistan (now Pakistan). Youth in West Bengal wasted their time and energy in shouting political slogans and in dreaming of a revolution that would bring Utopia on Earth.

Villagers were left uncared for. The only step taken by the Government during the last half a century was the abolition of Zamindari system and introduction of the so-called Panchayat Raj without paying attention to the formation of proper infrastructure for development of the land to make it suitable for modern farming, laying of road, power supply, health and education in rural Bengal. After the abolition of Zamindari system and imposition of land ceiling, well-to-do and above average people finding no amenities of life and no assurance of safety (during Naxalite movement in particular) left their ancestral villages for Calcutta or other district town where they could render little service to the country. On pre-independence days most of the service holders used to go back to their ancestral home villages upon retirement and their savings were invested and used in rural sector. But the recent trend is that people having moderate means and opportunity are selling out their land properties and flocking in small flats and plots in small towns having neither proper urban facility for living nor scope for self-employment.

Now any development programme for West Bengal must take into account all these factors if the programme is to be taken up in right earnest.

Ground Work Defined

West Bengal which is one of the largest deltas of the world is basically an agricultural land. This is true for India also. During the British regime, under forced circumstances, Calcutta was crowned the capital of India and

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the city was given the responsibility of creating an Industrial temper. Bengalees worked as writers, artisans and skilled workers. Now the sons of the soil have to realize the reality of history that the situation has changed totally after 15 August 1947, demographically, industrially and culturally. Nostalgia over past days would not help much in the struggle for existence in the present-day world.

At the present moment, before any attempt to implement any plan or programme for betterment of condition of the State of West Bengal, the following salient principles must be adhered to:

1. Bengalees must consider themselves Indians first and hence should join the national stream without nurturing narrow provincial outlook.
2. Scientific temper and technical approach must not be hampered by any political bias or doctrine.
3. The heritage and culture of India should be the guiding light in any approach to progress.
4. Community feeling should be enhanced and honoured in every work and walk of life.
5. Every development programme should bear the ultimate aim of development of *rural* Bengal.
6. People's active participation and involvement in all activities towards development should be encouraged. Even though the plans and programme might be implemented by the Government at the first stage, the final stage and status should be maintained and sustained by the people without depending upon Government help.

Community Polytechnic in Rural Uplift

For successful implementation of any package for development of Bengal — and this applies to any other part of the country — a good number of dedicated youth with technical knowledge and working skill is a must. Swami Vivekananda declared a century ago that he could change the shape of the motherland if he could get only one hundred young men. Swamiji also advocated technical knowledge. Technical vocational education and training is best suited for the development of a country. However, the present Polytechnic education system cannot deliver the goods. Formal system of Engineering & Polytechnic education can reach only a few privileged persons leaving the vast populace out of its orbit.

Community Polytechnic Scheme sponsored by M.H.R.D., G.O.I. and monitored by T.T.T.I. (Eastern Region), Calcutta, has a great potential for rural upliftment and thereby real development of Bengal, if properly supported by Government machinery and participated in by village bodies like Panchayat and the people, and if the help of sincere services from N.G.O.s is available.

Community Polytechnics should run one Community Technical centre to serve about twenty villages. Each Community Technical Centre (C.T.C.) should employ one Diploma Graduate in technology. Activities of Panchayat in technical field like laying & repairing of roads, erection & maintenance of public buildings and maintenance of water supply system, should be supervised by the staff of the Community Technical Centre (in the absence of regular Government or Semi-Government employee with technical knowledge. Even if there be a Government officer, the C.T.C. should be consulted because of its close contact with the village people).

Each district or sub-division should have one Community Polytechnic with a qualified Project Engineer and some field assistants. The local centre of Community Polytechnic, that is the Community Technical Centre, would help the main Community Polytechnic (in district or sub-division) in

(a) Socio-economic surveys
(b) Technical man-power development
(c) Support services
(d) Technical Information dissemination

Under Technical man-power development programme, Community Polytechnic

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with the help of C.T.C.s would arrange for hands-on training in

(a) Welding, Electric Wiring & Motor Winding, Two-Wheeler Repair, Radio & T.V. Repair, Agro Mechanics, Carpentry, Air Conditioner & Refrigerator Repairing, etc. for young men.

(b) Cutting & Tailoring, Knitting, Embroidery, Artcraft, etc. for women, and,

(c) Food Processing, Bee-Keeping, Mushroom Cultivation, etc. for men and women. The goal of this training has to be self-employment and not joining some service. Unless we have people who depend on themselves, we won't be able to maintain our independence as a nation.

Under transfer of technology programme, installation of low-cost housing, sanitary latrine, safe drinking water system, repair & maintenance of different household gadgets & agricultural implements will be taken up by Community Technical Centres. They will receive guidance from the Community Polytechnics.

Technical Information Dissemination should be taken up as vital ingredients of service by the Community Polytechnics. People of this country in general are not aware of the basics of technology in the gadgets they have been using. Technically enlightened mass of a country saves a lot of national wealth in the form of money, material, manpower and energy (fuel or electricity). Community Technical Centres would discuss with villagers topics related to gadgets & accessories used by common men. C.T.C. personnel would explain the contents of related pamphlets and booklets published by Community Polytechnics and get them interested in basic science and technology-based popular magazines like *Prayukti* (published by Ramakrishna Mission Shilpamandira Community Polytechnic, Belur Math). A scientific temper thus created is a forerunner to alleviation of poverty.

Transfer of Appropriate Technology and its use in rural areas will take the fruits of the scientific age to the door-steps of rural people. Community Polytechnics can take up the challenging and responsible role in the metamorphosis of rural Bengal and thereby set an example for the country itself.

The broad guidelines given above can be utilized in details in the following manner through Community Polytechnics.

Development of Infra-structure

Roads & Labour-based Transport

All-weather roads in villages connecting and serving each and every house should get top priority so that the inhabitants can meet any form of emergency and entrepreneurship, thereby feeling no need to leave the village for distant cities. The roads however need not be (rather must not be) so wide as to allow heavy duty lorries (unless necessary funds to maintain the roads are assured). All the rural roads are to be maintained by the villagers with the help of fund raised by themselves from low rate taxation of owners of bicycles, two-wheelers, shops, rickshaws, auto-rickshaws, etc. One metre wide would be ideal for plying cycles, motor-cycles, rickshaws, rickshaw-vans and auto-rickshaws. By one metre road it is suggested that the width should normally be one metre and at places sufficient for two-way traffic. This arrangement would help the local poor-wage earners like rickshaw and rickshaw-van plyers.

Power Electricity

Every village should be electrified. The line layout should be prepared in consultation with the persons involved in preservation of trees and in agreement with environmental principles.

Solar Cookers & Solar Heaters must be popularized.

Solar Cookers should be heavily subsidized so that a poor person can afford to have a cooker of his own. It is the poor rural people for whom the Solar Cooker is most suited

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because of the fact that

(a) They take very simple food,

(b) They take their lunch at late mid-day hours,

(c) They normally have to depend otherwise on wood, collected by cutting trees and plants engaging mostly women-folk for the whole day.

Solar Cooker should be considered as a part of the infra-structure and not merely as a cooking gadget, simply because 40% of wood from trees & plants are used up as fuel for cooking food in villages.

Technically Trained Man-power

Rural sector needs a huge number of technically trained youth. While manufacture of almost all modern gadgets and appliances will be in the hands of urban industrial group, maintenance and repair of them would have to be carried out by local technicians and skilled workers. Proper maintenance and repair of gadgets would lead to a lot of saving especially because our country is a thickly populated one and the populace is not rich as it is in the western countries.

Skilled workmen and technicians for repair & maintenance work would be groomed in local community technical training centres. For this type of trained technicians and workers, a Community (Technical) Training Centre should be run in every 20 to 25 villages.

Habitat with Basic Amenities

No progress or development is possible without proper habitat for the people. Low cost & technically sound programmes should be taken up to make the rural sector not only habitable but attractive with its natural advantages.

Low Cost Housing

Considering the climate of West Bengal it is recommended that low cost housing for rural sector should consider the feasibility of:

(a) Two-storey building: the ground floor being used for cooking, storage & dining and the upper floor for bed & living. Usable floor area remaining the same, the concept of two-storey unit would lead to saving of land and lowering of cost along with better living facility.

(b) Wall thickness 13 cm. (½ brick) with 25 cm. x 25 cm. integrated brick pillar. Brick work with mud mortar and plaster.

A 2.5 cm. thick Damp Proof course is a must.

(c) The roof with corrugated iron sheets or Ranigange Tiles or thatch. Roof will always be sloped.

(d) First floor with R.B. Casting.

(e) Smokeless chullahs must replace all conventional ones.

(f) Compost pit in every house.

Safe Drinking Water

Protected wells with simple method of using disinfectants are ideal for rural people. The State of West Bengal which is thickly populated by not-well-to-do people must not go for deep tube wells with elaborate system of pumping of water from underneath and distribution of water through network of pipelines (as has been done in some places selected by political leaders). On the other hand, ponds and other natural surface water reservoirs have been converted to fish-manufacturing water-containers. Under the circumstances, the ponds cannot be depended upon as a source of safe drinking water for people. Tube wells are susceptible to arsenic poisoning. Since time immemorial wells have been used as sources of drinking water in different countries. Wells are very congenial to development of community feeling and relationship among its users and wastage of ground water is minimized. Maintenance, again, is simple and cheap.

Mechanized methods for digging wells may be adopted.

Sanitation

Sanitation facility is to be provided to every inhabitant. Considering the increased

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population and danger of contamination of water sources, open air defecation must be totally stopped.

Bi-Barrier Pit Latrine (Dry Pit Latrine) as developed at Ramakrishna Mission Shilpamandira C.R.D.T., Belur Math, may be installed for the benefit of rural community. The said type of latrine is totally free from any risk of contamination of underground water. When the latrine units are built in cascades, cost per unit is lowered and at the same time the maintenance of the unit will be done by individual users. As there is no common tank or pit for a group, there is no possibility of lack of proper care or maintenance.

Health Care by Visiting Doctors

Regular visit by expert doctors is of prime necessity in rural areas. Preventive health-care should be arranged for at all Community Centres. Practising doctors in cities can take up village health-care work in large numbers.

Livelihood

Per capita land being low, new types of agriculture should be practised.

Mushroom cultivation should be encouraged.

West Bengal is very poor in the implementation of scientific bee-keeping. It should be taken up earnestly.

Women should be trained in different trades like cutting & tailoring, wool-knitting, embroidery so that they may earn something for their own.

Secretarial practice including shorthand, English — spoken and written — and computer literacy will be helpful for women and C.T.C. can take up such work.

Community Technical Centres will add technical approach in all trades for self-employment.

Community Hall

For about one thousand heads there should be one multipurpose Community Hall. The hall would be used normally in the morning by children, during midday & afternoon by women and children, in the evening it should be used by the aged. The hall may be used on occasions at nominal charges for (a) Workshop on development programmes, (b) Awareness programmes, (c) Discussions on science, literature, religion, (d) Cultural functions, (e) Magic show, (f) Puppet show, (g) Felicitations to persons of distinction, etc.

Acquaintance with Cultural Heritage of India

No nation can survive without a feeling of pride in its cultural heritage. Quality people can come out only of a community having a deep respect for its heritage. Community Technical Centres would give infra-structural support to cultural activities of the community members.

The Community Hall or primary school building should be annexed with an open stage where drama and opera based on Pauranic stories would be played regularly.

Every Temple of the village (specially the old ones) should be renovated. To raise fund for the maintenance of temples, stalls may be erected and rented. Repair and maintenance of temples would make the supervising staff experienced in the traditional temple construction technique of past days.

Religious recitals should be encouraged. In the past this practice helped to strengthen the social bond among men and women based on moral values without which any programme for progress is bound to be futile.

Education

Secondary School Education being controlled by Board of Secondary Education, extra curricular activities especially social work, work for beautification of villages should be taken up by the students, encouraged by teachers.

Secondary School should run night classes on religious subjects for aged persons.

Every school should be provided with a microscope and a telescope. Once or twice a

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week general people may be given opportunity (at a nominal fee) to see the moon, the planets and the mysterious sky at night as also the wonders of the microscopic world (bacteria, blood cells, etc.). These activities would go a long way in removing superstition from the minds of the masses. Awareness of the vastness and minuteness of the universe would broaden the mind of even an 'ordinary man'.

More primary schools are needed. Primary schools run by villagers may be free from the bondage and obligation to the policies of the ruling government party.

Schools run by villagers would make the students learn through their mother tongue. Children should get acquainted with English script & words and Roman numerals at primary level.

Exposure to Computer: A hundred years ago Swami Vivekananda asked the youth to go to villages with magic lantern to project in the minds of rural people the essence of events in the world. Computer is today's 'magic lantern'. People should be given some exposure on working with computer.

Beautification of Village

This programme is needed to cultivate love for the habitat in the mind of youth and children. The following activities may be taken up:

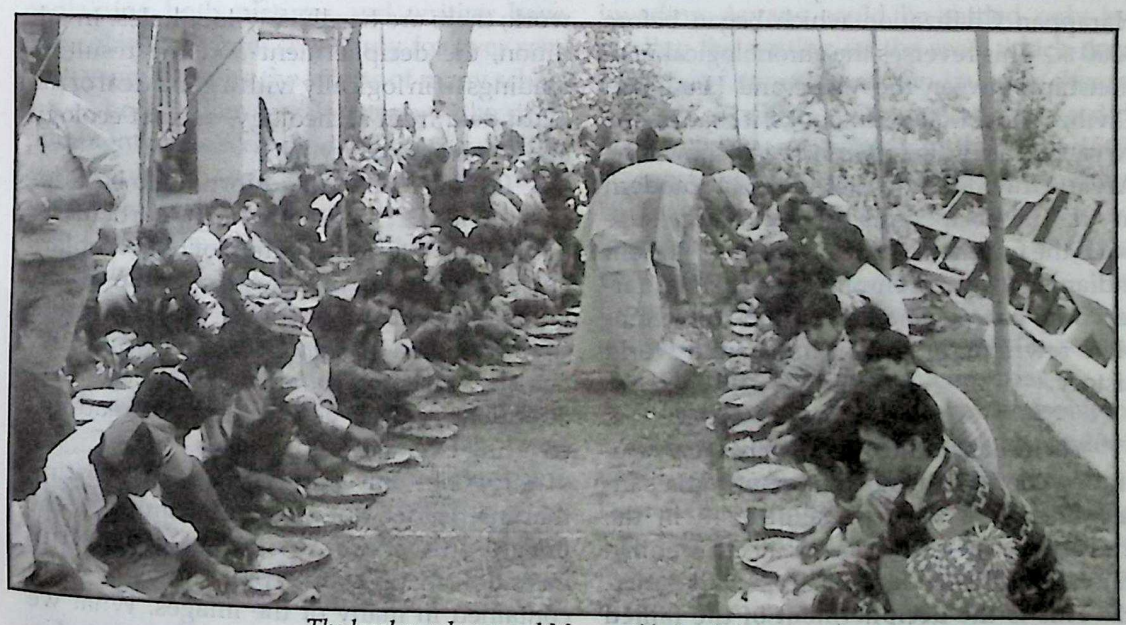
Plantation of saplings in a planned way.

Preservation of old trees in a scientific way.

Natural water reservoirs may be made attraction centres by making arrangement for small pedalled boating, etc.

Conclusion

We have crossed the 100th year of the establishment of Ramakrishna Mission and 50th year of Self-Rule of the Indian Nation. Today we have a lot of expectations to fulfil. The call of Swami Vivekananda for the uplift of the masses, emancipation of women, proper education for all, and eradication of poverty has to be responded to. We expect all educated, well-to-do, thinking people to come forward to make this Community Movement a success. ❐



The local people around Mayavati being fed

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Vedic Language and Symbols in the Deciphered Indus Seals

DR. N.S. RAJARAM

On the topic of the decipherment of Indus Seals, the author says: 'It is not only the script and the writing that interest us, but also the meaning of the images on the seals. Deciphering the script has allowed us to interpret the symbolism contained in many of the images. What we find is that there are deep connections between the images on the seals and the symbolisms found in Vedic and Vedantic texts. ...the decipherment has helped change the whole historical picture.' We feel that the reader should note, as an instance, that the symbolism in the 'Magnificent Bull' seal has been related to the Mahābhārata *passage* viddhi mām vṛsamuttamam *though the inscription on the said seal (see photograph) reads* indraḥ. *That 'many of the words found on the seals must be from the Naighaṇṭuka Padākhyāna of which Yaska's* Nighaṇṭu *is a later edition', we believe, needs to be closely scrutinised.*

The recent decipherment of the Harappan script has allowed scholars to identify deep connections between the Vedic literature and Harappan archaeology. The written messages on the seals are from the later Vedic and Vedantic texts, while the images often embody Vedic symbolism. This means that much of the Vedic literature, the *Rig-veda* in particular, is considerably older than the Harappan Civilization which began before 3000 BC. This reverses the chronological relationship between the Vedic and Harappan Civilization found in textbooks; it shatters the Aryan invasion theory, and also shows the Aryan-Dravidian divide to be a modern myth. The decipherment by and large supports the traditional Indian version of ancient Indian history and chronology. This has far-reaching consequences, and calls for a complete rewriting of ancient Indian and world history.

The Breakthrough

As India and the world were busy celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence, a major breakthrough in the study of Indian history has created turmoil in scholarly circles in India, Europe and America. **This is the decipherment of the famed Harappan script (or Indus script) by Dr. Natwar Jha, a Vedic scholar and palaeographer from West Bengal.** It attracted not only scholarly attention which is natural, but also great popular interest in India and abroad.

There is bound to be controversy over some of the details, but by and large the acceptance of Dr. Jha's decipherment has been surprisingly smooth and rapid. Part of the reason lies in the thoroughness of Dr. Jha's work; there are hardly any loopholes. In addition, the decipherment and the resulting readings fit in logically with a good deal of the latest data from archeology, ancient ecology and satellite imagery.

It has been my good fortune to be associated with Dr. Jha in this effort, particularly in bringing it to the attention of both scholars and interested lay readers all over the world. Dr. Jha and I are now working on a book that we have called *The Indus Script: A New Direction* in which we provide a complete decipherment as well as hundreds of readings covering over a thousand seals.

It is not only the script and the writing that interest us, but also the meaning of the images on the seals. Deciphering the script has allowed us to interpret the symbolism contained in many of the images. What we find is that there are deep connections be-

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tween the images on the seals and the symbolisms found in Vedic and Vedantic texts. In the remainder of the article I will provide a brief overview of the symbolism and explain how the decipherment has helped change the whole historical picture. I will provide also a brief description of the deciphered Indus script along with a few examples. For fuller details of the decipherment and the related history, the reader is advised to consult the books and articles listed at the end of this article.

The Challenge

First a little background. The Indus Valley Civilization known also as the Harappan was discovered in the twenties of this century by Daya Ram Sahni and Rakhal Das Bannerji working under the direction of Sir John Marshall. The first cities discovered were Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, both now in Pakistan. These are part of a vast civilization spread over more than a million square kilometres, making it by far the most extensive civilization in antiquity.

Among the more important finds are some 4000 terra-cotta seals unearthed by archaeologists. These famous 'Harappan seals' containing both pictures and writing have been objects of intensive study for over seventy years. Despite the efforts of many scholars — both Indian and Western — the decipherment of the script and the language of the seals remained one of the great unsolved problems of the twentieth century.

Part of the problem can be attributed to the confused historical picture resulting from various theories. Prior to the discovery of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, scholars held that civilization was brought to India by bands of nomadic invaders from Central Asia known as the Aryans. These invaders were said to have composed the Vedas after coming to India sometime after 1500 BC. This is the famous Aryan invasion theory that in one form or another is still found in history books. According to this theory, there was no civilization in India prior to the coming of the Aryans in 1500 BC.

The discovery of the great Harappan Civilization, found to be flourishing more than a thousand years before the invading Aryans supposedly brought civilization into India, cast doubts on the whole notion of the Aryan invasion. To account for this obvious contradiction, linguists offered an ingenious explanation. They suggested that the Harappans spoke a language called Proto Dravidian unrelated to Sanskrit — the language of the invading Aryans. This, they claimed, was the ancestor of South Indian languages — notably Tamil. According to this new scenario, the Proto Dravidian speakers were uprooted by the invading Aryans who destroyed their cities and forced them to migrate and settle in South India. In offering this explanation few seemed to notice that the original inhabitants — called a 'rabble of aboriginal savages' — became now the creators of the great Harappan Civilization, while the Aryans are turned into the barbarians who destroyed it!

In the face of these scholars' inability to read the Harappan writing, all this is little more than conjecture. The real nature of the connection between the Harappans and the invading Aryans could be settled only by reading the writing on the seals which they left behind. Since the Aryan invasion theory held that Sanskrit language and the Vedas did not come into existence in India before 1500 BC, most linguists held on to the view that the language of the Harappans — and of the Harappan seals — could only be Proto Dravidian. As previously observed, this Proto Dravidian was said to be a form of ancient Tamil. Several scholars tried to reconstruct it using existing Tamil records.

This presented a formidable problem. The oldest Tamil known is only about 2000 years old, while most of the Indus seals are at least 4000 years old. This called for bridging a two thousand year gap to arrive at the language of the Harappans with no records from the intervening period to help us. This can be compared to reconstructing the language of

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the Celtic Druids living in England 2000 years ago from modern English, while remaining in complete ignorance of the history and literature of the intervening two thousand years. Undeterred by the challenge, several scholars went to construct what they claimed to be the ancient Proto Dravidian used by the Harappans. Despite such valiant efforts, the script and the language of the Indus seals remained undeciphered for over seventy years.

Mahabharata—
the Guide to the Decipherment

This was the situation when Dr. Natwar Jha began his own research into the problem some twenty years ago. He noticed that the idea of the Aryan invasion of India appears for the first time only in the nineteenth century, in European writings. In the vast body of Indian literature going back thousands of years — the Vedas, the Puranas, the epics, historical chronicles and several others — no one seems to get any inkling of such an invasion. In addition, archaeologists found no evidence for any invasion in ancient times. Indian linguists also — going back to Panini and Yaska thousands of years ago — mention no languages like Proto Dravidian though they recorded several others that have since disappeared.

From all this Dr. Jha concluded that the Dravidian hypothesis of the Harappans lacks support. He decided that the language of the Harappans must be a very old language related to Sanskrit. Fortunately, knowledge of the oldest of them — Vedic Sanskrit — is still preserved in India; Dr. Jha is himself a Vedic scholar of note. He began also a study of ancient inscriptions for clues to their writing. With the help of these he was finally able to decipher the script. In this he was helped by an ancient Vedic glossary known as the *Nighaṇṭu* compiled from still older sources by Yaska as we shall soon see.

A detailed comparison with known ancient scripts of India and West Asia led Dr. Jha to conclude that the Indus script must have been the ancestor of a script known as Brahmi used in ancient Indian inscriptions. This allowed him to read the messages on a few seals, but not in sufficient quantity to decipher a useful number of inscriptions. Usually it requires more than mere knowledge of the alphabet to decipher ancient writing. It is helpful to have some idea of the subject matter of the inscriptions also. In this the various theories about Dravidians and invasion were no help at all; if anything, they were a hindrance.

He then searched for more clues in ancient Indian works. His search took him to the *Mahabharata* (Gita Press Critical Edition), where finally he struck gold. In a little known but extraordinary passage (in Chapter 342 of the *Mokshadharma Parva* of the *Shanti Parva*), Dr. Jha found descriptions of several commonly occurring objects on the seals as also the source from which many of the words inscribed on the seals are drawn. Here Krishna himself speaking as Vishnu describes three of the most commonly occurring objects on the seals:

viddhi māṁ vṛṣamuttamam
(Know Me as the Magnificent Bull)
—verse 88

ekaśṛṅga...divyadarśanaḥ
(One-ho rned ... Divine Appearance.)
—verse 92

trikakut tena vikhyātaḥ
(Renowned with Three Body Parts.)
—verse 93

From the photographs of the seals displayed we can see that the passage in the *Mahabharata* is describing these fabulous creatures. But the *Mahabharata* account does not stop here, for it tells us also where to look for the words inscribed on the seals.

The same passage which contains descriptions of these mythical creatures contains also references to an ancient work on Vedic etymology known as *Nirukta* composed by the legendary Vedic sage Yaska (verse 72). Fortunately Yaska's *Nirukta* is still extant and widely in use. It contains a glossary of Vedic words known as the *Nighaṇṭu*;

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the *Nighaṇṭu* is a later edition of a still earlier Vedic glossary known as the *Naighaṇṭuka Padākhyāna* attributed to a very ancient sage called Kashyapa Prajapati (verses 88–9). From these *Mahabharata* passages we learn that descriptions of these fabulous creatures are to be found in this ancient glossary; in particular, it tells us that the *Naighaṇṭuka Padākhyāna* contains a description of the 'Magnificent Bull'. Therefore, Dr. Jha concluded that many of the words found on the seals must be from the *Naighaṇṭuka Padākhyāna* of which Yaska's *Nighaṇṭu* is a later edition.

The existence of this glossary greatly simplified the search for words on the seals; instead of searching the vast Vedic literature running into thousands of pages, one could limit oneself to this small glossary of some twenty pages. The two together — the structure of the script determined as Old Brahmi, and knowledge of the vocabulary as coming from the Vedic glossary — yielded the decipherment. Dr. Jha's monograph on the decipherment is appropriately named *Vedic Glossary on Indus Seals.*

Indian tradition holds: 'What is found in the *Mahabharata* may be found elsewhere, but what is not found here is nowhere.' The boast has certainly proven true in the case of the Indus script. Without the guidance provided by the *Mahabharata*, there would be no decipherment.

The Deciphered Indus Script

Following the decipherment it is possible to see that the Harappan script is the ancestor of the ancient Brahmi script used in Ashoka's inscriptions, which in turn is the ancestor of all Indian and many Southeast Asian scripts. The whole thing now makes perfect sense: the *language* of the seals is Vedic Sanskrit from which Indian languages have heavily borrowed; and the *script* itself is the ancestor of Brahmi, the mother of all Indian scripts.

As far as the Harappan script is concerned, it is similar to modern Indian writing, but like most ancient scripts shows a deficiency of vowels. For the most part only consonants are used; it is up to the reader to supply the necessary vowels. For example, some of the seals contain the word *na-ra-tta-ma* which must be read as 'narottama'. Similarly, the word *ra-va-sha-ta-ka-sha* has to be read as 'ravishataksha'.

This is how ancient writing was done in most languages — without vowels. A problem arises when a word begins with a vowel. To meet this requirement, the Indus scribes hit upon an ingenious device: they indicated all vowel beginnings with a U-shaped symbol. With this device, *agni* is written as Ugn, *indra* as Undr and so on. With this innovation it becomes possible to write any Sanskrit word.

The accompanying table (see the page after the next) provides several examples of deciphered readings[1].

Vedic Symbolism: Seals As A Vedic Database

Let us next look at the symbolism of the seals which is rich in Vedic ideas. It is obviously beyond the scope of a single article to go into it in any detail. What I will do instead

1. Some words (*indraḥ* and *induḥ*) though similar phonetically, are written differently because the Indus script is very rich in homophones (and both represent 'na'). Also, as in modern Indian scripts, the composite letters are formed in two ways: placing them side by side (= 'nd'), or one below the other (= 'nd'). There was far less standardization than in other ancient scripts like Linear B.

   Even modern English writing has a lot of ambiguities when it comes to phonetics. For instance '*c*', '*k*', '*q*' are like homophones in '*king*', '*queen*', '*cat*'. Similarly '*v*' and '*w*' are homophones while '*y*' is different (a polyphone) in '*my*' and '*yes*'. The letter '*c*' is also a polyphone as in '*centre*', '*cut*', and '*chart*'. (English has no soft '*c*' as in Italian). The Indus script is much more regular than this.

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Examples of Decipherment from the Indus Seals

Group I: 𐌀 as in a, ā	𐌀 𐌄	*āpaḥ*
	𐌀 𐌅 𐌇	*agniḥ*
	𐌀 𐌉 𐌊	*aryamā*
Group II: 𐌀 as in i, ī	𐌀 𐌋 𐌌 𐌍	*indraḥ*
	𐌀 𐌎 𐌏	*īśvaraḥ*
	𐌀 𐌐 𐌇	*induḥ*
Group III: Miscellaneous	𐌑 𐌒 𐌓 𐌔	*mṛtyuḥ*
	𐌀 𐌊	*yama*
	𐌕 𐌖 𐌑 𐌇	*kartaḥ*
	𐌗 𐌏 𐌘 𐌙	*bharitre*
	𐌚 𐌛 𐌜 𐌝	*daśarātra*
	𐌀 𐌞 𐌄 𐌖 𐌀 𐌛 𐌊	*arkāpta veśma*

is illustrate it with the help of an example. For the purpose I have chosen the seal containing the 'bow-shaped' image with the *aśvattha* leaves — a sacred symbol. The photo shows the seal in question. For reasons that I will next explain this seal is known as 'oṅkāra mudrā'.

Along with the seal photo, I have displayed also two line drawings of the seal. The one above is in the original position, while the other is rotated by ninety degrees. The reader will immediately recognize the one below to be the letter 'OM' used in Devanagari and other North Indian scripts. What is interesting is that South Indian scripts like Kannada and Telugu retained the original orientation while slightly elongating it.

The description of this seal is found in the *Mundaka Upanishad* as the 'bow-shaped Praṇava Akṣara'. ('Praṇava' means OM.) Other Upanishads, notably the *Katha Upanishad* contain similar descriptions. Even the *Bhagavadgita* has such a reference. The written message on the seal can be deciphered as *'varadah sah redhate'* which is a reference to a famous verse[2] in the fourth book of the *Rigveda.*

This is just one example. But it is sufficient to show how deep are the connections between the Harappan seals and the Vedic literature. In our book Dr. Jha and I provide hundreds of references to Vedic and Vedantic texts found on the seals. What we find is that the written messages are often from auxiliary Vedic texts like glossaries and indexes, while the images on the seals are symbolic representations of themes and concepts found in primary texts like the Vedas and the Upanishads. So we can say that many of the seals were part of an ancient 'Vedic database' that linked the auxiliary texts to the primary texts.

Changed Historical Picture

From all this we may safely conclude that there are very deep connections between the Harappan Civilization and the Vedic culture. The Aryan invasion is a modern myth. The decipherment may be seen as the last nail into the Aryan invasion coffin, and along with it the various theories about the Aryan-Dravidian divide and their linguistic theories.

2. See *RV* 4.58.3— a pretty good rendering of its fourth pada—*maho devo martyām āviveśa* ('The mighty divine enshrined in the heart of all mortals').

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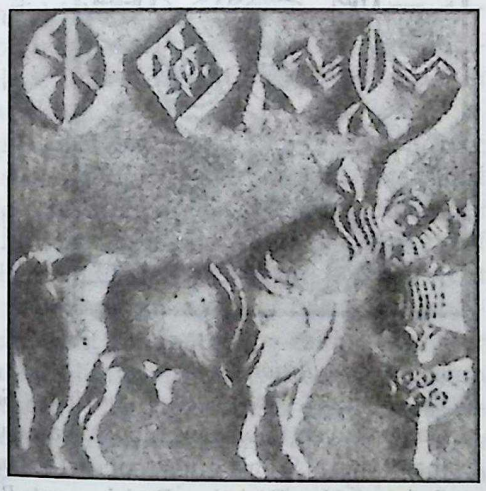
Indus Seals in the Mahabharata

viddhi mām vṛśamuttamam
(Know Me as the Magnificent Bull)
[The inscription reads *indraḥ* — *Ed.*]



ekaśṛṅga…divyadarśanaḥ
(One-horned … Divine Apparition)

trikakut tena vikhyātaḥ
(… Renowned with Three Body Parts)

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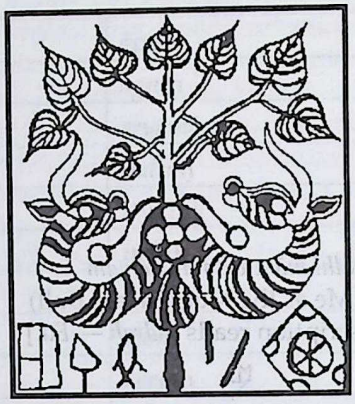
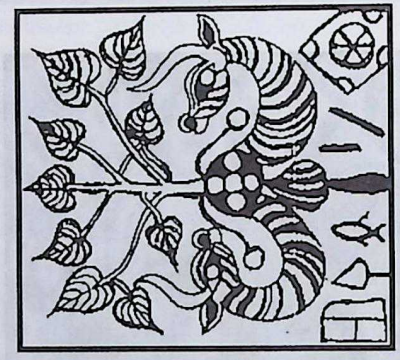
Harappan OM — Original and Rotated

Harappan Seal



Original Harappan OM



Rotated by 90° gives Devanagari OM

What the decipherment shows is that the whole civilization of India which includes Aryans as well as Dravidians derives from a single mighty source — the *Rigveda.*

But what the decipherment does is much more than simply drive another nail in the coffin of a discredited theory. The Harappans speak to us again, and speak to us in a language that we understand — Vedic Sanskrit. They were part of a civilization that has existed continuously from the time of the *Rigveda* to our own.

After this, the history of India — and the world — will never be the same. All history books in the world will now have to be rewritten to reflect this revolution.❐

Additional Readings

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Singapore — A Marvel of Human Resources

SWAMI JAYADEVANANDA

Swami Vivekananda wanted that Indians should go to foreign lands and see how the engines of those societies were functioning. That experience gives one an education which one cannot learn with as much ease by staying within the borders of the motherland. It is very surprising how Singapore, with only human resources as her asset, has climbed up the ladder. How much more could India have accomplished in fifty years after her independence, if only her human resources were comparable? Would she not surpass all other nations if her countrymen practised the religion of Vedanta?

The author, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, was the Head of the Mission's centre at Singapore. In this thought-provoking article he makes appreciative remarks about Singapore. One cannot but wish that India too would soon rise to her feet.*

Singapore — the seat of the Merlion, a mythical half-fish and half-lion — is today one of the premier countries taking her rightful place among other advanced countries in the world.

Destiny has brought the island a long way since 1819, when Sir (Thomas) Stamford Raffles (1781-1826) brought Singapore under East India Company, governed by the Law of the British Empire. Housing twenty-eight lakh inhabitants, Singapore has today forty-five different nationalities speaking fifty-four languages living in peaceful co-existence on the island. There are hardly any natural resources — even drinking water needs to be bought from Malaysia! But, Singapore is a bright example of a nation which has reached the pinnacle of progress simply by harnessing her own human resources.

The very first day after reaching Singapore, I recalled an anecdote about Narendranath at Dakshineswar when he was accompanied by friends who were not spiritually inclined. Narendranath told them to go and amuse themselves by looking at the buildings. At first it seemed to me that I too had been sent to Singapore to look at the buildings!

In Singapore, the greatest and the richest resource is the human resources. In just thirty years, the country acquired a highly distinguished position among all other countries in political, international and trade areas. Every single individual in Singapore is employed — even the disabled are given jobs at car parking plots.

The entire city is flawlessly clean. Even hospitals and crematoriums are marked by a sense of aesthetics and impeccable cleanliness. Pollution is well controlled so as not to increase pressure on resources. Offices and institutions are run very systematically and punctually, and underhand bribery or unfairness is completely absent from all workplaces. People are continually inculcated with a feeling of love and patriotism for their homeland in several interesting ways. The standard of education is considerably high and every young boy has to undergo military training without which he is not entitled to get a job. The government keeps track of the good students who are given positions of responsibility in academics or sent abroad for higher education after they complete graduation. On their return, they are given ministe-

* The article was received on 7 July 1998 through Swami Mumukshanandaji. Swami Jayadevanandaji passed away on 11 July 1998.

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rial or secretarial jobs. Retirement is compulsory at sixty years of age, and retired employees can live comfortably on their provident fund accumulated during their period of service. Day-care centres take care of children whose parents are employed. Thus, poverty is almost absent.

The government is a highly disciplinarian one — but it also takes care of its people adequately. People are particularly rule-abiding. Cars zoom past at 100 miles per hour on roads where no traffic police is posted, but the drivers never disobey traffic signals. Drug smuggling is prohibited by law and the sentence is death. Smoking is subject to a fine of $ 1000, if done on public transport. Security and surveillance are of a very high standard. Police are extremely polite but at the same time quite firm. Constant vigilance is kept on immigrants.

The future of the nation is its youth. Children and youth are given the best of facilities in every manner possible by the government. The Science Centres, Omni Theatres, Museum, Night Safari, Underwater World, and other attractions have been specially devised for children as well as for tourists.

Old-age homes and centres for the homeless take care of the needy and the neglected. Among the centres which dispense care to the needy, the Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home is one which has been looking after orphans for the last fifty years. The Boys' Home dates back to 1942 when Swami Bhaswarananda took into his fold many orphan boys who at that time had lost their parents due to the Japanese invasion. In and around this Home are the temple for Sri Ramakrishna, the Cultural Centre, the Counselling Centre for juvenile delinquents and a Homoeopathy Centre.

The temple holds prayer services to commemorate the birth of incarnations: Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Jesus Christ, Shankaracharya, and Lord Buddha. Inter-religious organizations hold meets every month in which religious harmony is emphasized. Since the Sarada Kindergarten began its venture, hundreds of young children have received 'a home away from home' where values are taught to them. Children are taught lessons through *bhajans* and often through informative trips to Sentosa and Science Park. The new Kindergarten building has been constructed at a cost of 1.5 million dollars.

Today, when I look up at the skyscrapers rising high to touch the starlit Singapore night sky, I am reminded of Swami Vivekananda's dream for India. He hoped to see India develop herself and take her place among the best in the world. But unfortunately, India did not obey the mandate of Swami Vivekananda to prepare her human resources. Consequently, we earned for ourselves a downslide after independence, whereas Singapore has risen to the top position in just thirty years and solely on her own efforts — the notable contribution coming from a dedicated and visionary leader, Lee Kuan. Under his premiership, Singapore has developed into a dazzling new city from a marshy swamp land. Today, Singapore is truly an example for all of us to emulate. ❐

First go to other countries and study carefully their manners and conditions with your own eyes—not with others'—and reflect on them ... then read your own scriptures, your ancient literature, travel throughout India and mark the people of her different parts and their ways and habits with the wide-awake eye of an intelligent and keen observer ... and you will see as clean as noonday that the nation is still living intact and its life is surely pulsating.

—*Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 163

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Sister Nivedita and Revolutionary Politics: An Analytical Assessment

DR. MAMATA RAY & DR. ANIL BARAN RAY

There is much controversy over how far Sister Nivedita, firmly convinced that India could raise herself only by achieving political freedom, involved herself in revolutionary politics. In this article, the learned authors discuss threadbare both points of view: (a) that she merely played a 'limited role' of presenting books to the 'secret' Society and of giving inspiring lectures to the young men to instil national fervour into them, and, (b) that she was positively involved in revolutionary politics and had a group of young men hovering around her whom she supported in every possible manner — through advice, material assistance or help in some other form — looking upon them as precious jewels; that she went to the extent of helping some of the revolutionaries in gaining knowhow in the manfacture of bombs even by smuggling them into the Presidency College as assistants to Dr. Jagadish Chandra Bose and Dr. P.C. Roy. The authors conclude that Mme. Lizelle Reymond did a good job of presenting the political life of Sister Nivedita in a reliable way drawing upon sources which are authentic. The authors hold that Reymond's one mistake was not to present the sources in her book, The Dedicated, *which led to much criticism of her work and much writing too against her stand by presenting Nivedita as one who played a limited role only in the revolutionary activities. The authors also bring out Nivedita's training in Ireland which helped her to play her role in a highly secretive way avoiding the gaze of the ever-watchful police. Not only did she throw dust in the eyes of the police, she even succeeded in finding adherents to the limited role hypothesis of her involvement in the revolutionary politics in Bengal. Say the authors, 'her revolutionism included support to secret socieites, guerilla warfare and armed uprising, but did not extend to terrorism....'*

One also gets in this article a peep into Nivedita's mind. Nivedita's words to Bhupendranath Dutta cannot but make a deep dent in our minds: 'Bhupen, remember you belong to Mother India. Keep that love undaunted. Do not build a family; you are to belong to the country.' Secondly, Nivedita sincerely believed that she was doing her Master's bidding and once, exasperated by circumstances, she said: 'I thought to turn the world upside down, so strong was the life that I felt within me and I am crying to the winds, and only the winds take up and echo my cry — ah Swamiji! — and you had such a trust in me!'

At the instance of her Master Swami Vivekananda, Sister Nivedita[1] came to India to work primarily for the education of women in India. Upon Swamiji's *mahasamadhi* on 4 July 1902, Sister Nivedita however conceived her new task as that of awakening the nation and leading it to a political fight against the British Raj of India. This article intends to throw some light on the nature and degree of Nivedita's involvement in the revolutionary politics of the period 1902–1910 by making an analytical assessment of facts and opinions regarding such involvement.

I

Nivedita knew that her 'new' task was a stupendous one and yet would not shrink

1. Born Margaret Elizabeth Noble in Ireland in 1867 and initiated as Sister Nivedita by Swami Vivekananda on 25 March 1898.

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from it. In her letter of 24 July 1902 she wrote:

> Now as to my task, I may not succeed.... But ought this to make any difference? I *see* — therefore ought I not to act? Must we not throw ourselves now into the great Ocean of Mother — and leave it to Her whether we come to land or not?[2]

'I *see*, therefore I must act' — is probably the ultimate in the vocabulary of a political missionary. The political stand of Sister Nivedita had even earlier placed the authorities of the Belur Math in a spot. They could not permit a member of the Ramakrishna Order to indulge in political activities. It was against the constitution of the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Brahmananda, therefore, had written to Nivedita, and she too had resolved the crisis by replying to the following effect on 18 July 1902 itself.

> Dear Swami Brahmananda,
>
> Will you accept on behalf of the Order and myself my acknowledgement of your letter this morning. Painful as is the occasion I can but acquiesce in any measure that are necessary to my complete freedom.
>
> I trust however that you and other members of the Order will not fail to lay my love and reverence daily at the feet of the ashes of Sri Ramakrishna and my own beloved Guru.
>
> I shall write to the Indian papers and acquaint as quietly as possible with my changed position.
>
> Yours in all gratitude and good faith,
> *Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.*[3]

The very next day, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta informed the public of the *changed* position of Sister Nivedita to the following effect: '...it has been decided between the members of the Order at Belur Math and Sister Nivedita that her work shall henceforth be regarded as free and entirely independent of their sanction of authority.'[4] In a letter written to *The Statesman* dated 28 July 1902, Sister Nivedita discounted the rumour that on the death of her Master, Swami Vivekananda, she had become the 'leader of the Order of Ramakrishna' and informed the general public for certain that she had, in fact, been 'set free' by the Order to pursue her work 'entirely outside their direction and supervision'[5].

Free to pursue her work in her own way, Nivedita undertook in September 1902 a six weeks' speaking tour to Bombay, Nagpur, Bhandara, Wardha, Amraoti, Ahmedabad and Baroda.[6] Of these places, Nagpur and Baroda deserve special mention because in Nagpur Nivedita 'saw for the first time at first- hand the consequence [the deportations] of the open struggle against Britain'[7] and in Baroda she met Aurobindo Ghose, then a professor of Baroda College and a keen votary of armed revolution against the British government in India. Their common revolutionary aspiration drew the author of *Kali the Mother* and the writer of the fiery articles in the *Indu Prakash* — one of Bombay's large newspapers — immediately close together.[8] This is how Lizelle Reymond, a French lady,

2. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, ed. Sankari Prasad Basu (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1982), vol. 1, p. 483; letter dated 24 July 1902. [Hereafter, *Letters.*]
3. *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 482; letter dated 18 July 1902.
4. Quoted in Lizelle Reymond, *The Dedicated* (Madras: Samata Books, 1985), p. 264. Reymond's biography of Nivedita was originally written in French. The English version *The Dedicated* was published in 1953 by John Day Co. of New York. A corrected edition of the book was brought out by Samata Books of Madras in 1985. [Hereafter, *Dedicated.*]
5. *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 530.
6. *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 519.
7. *Dedicated*, p. 268.
8. Having described as to how he, as the representative of the Gaekwar of Baroda, received Nivedita at the Baroda railway station and drove her to the state guest house, Sri Aurobindo writes that 'I was very much enamoured at the time of her book *Kali the Mother* and I think we spoke of that.' Sri Aurobindo further reports that he was present at the

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and the first ever biographer of Nivedita, describes the immediate results of the meeting between the two:

> His [Aurobindo's] plan [for actualising revolutionary aspirations] was widely conceived, and was gradually implemented as he enlisted the necessary men to form a network through towns and villages from Baroda to Bengal. But Nivedita was impatient. 'Calcutta needs you,' she told him, 'Your place is in Bengal.'
>
> 'Not yet,' he answered, 'I am working behind the lines. But the advance posts must be manned.' 'You can count on me,' Nivedita said, stretching out her hand. 'I am your ally.'[9]

The alliance led to a period of collaboration between the two in the revolutionary politics of Bengal. There are conflicting versions as to the nature of this collaboration. According to Pravrajika Atmaprana, Nivedita-Aurobindo collaboration was brief and Nivedita's involvement or participation in revolutionary politics was marginal or limited, even though her political views were not unsympathetic to revolution-making in India.

To quote Atmaprana:

> Many fantastic stories regarding revolutionary activities later evolved round the meeting of these two persons, first in Baroda and afterwards in Calcutta.[10]

Writing in the same vein, Atmaprana observes elsewhere in her book:

> It cannot be denied that she [Nivedita] brought the full force of her intellectual and moral powers to bear upon the national movement. But unfortunately for us, much fiction, with no foundation in actual facts, is woven into the accounts that describe her political activity. Many books and articles on that period have now been written. Unable on the one hand to omit her name as one of the leading figures of the times, and on the other hand, not being able to evaluate her contribution in the work, attempts have been made to picture her variously as an adventuress, a glorified heroine, a secret political agent or a terrorist. These misrepresentations do injustice to her memory.[11]

Barbara Foxe, the English biographer of Nivedita, lends powerful support to the thesis put forward by Atmaprana by making the following observation:

> It was at Baroda that she [Nivedita] met Aurobindo Ghosh, later to be imprisoned for nationalist activities, and the stories which eventually grew up concerning the meeting of these two, first in Baroda and later in Calcutta, became more and more fantastic as time went on. Indeed, those who regarded her chief claim to respect and adulation as being the *doubtful* honour of achieving status as a bomb-throwing revolutionary, refused to the end to believe that nothing very sinister had happened on either of these occasions *in spite of Aurobindo's denial of her involvement.*[12]

Barbara Foxe gives another reason for discounting the story of bomb-throwing revolutionary:

> Before 1902 — that vital year in her life — was over, there was one memory added to many others of the past which she recorded in

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meeting between Nivedita and the Gaekwar wherein Nivedita requested Gaekwar to help the cause of secret revolution in India. She requested the Maharaja to contact her later for this purpose through Sri Aurobindo. Having reported this, Sri Aurobindo observes that the Maharaja however never talked to him regarding such matters in future. Aurobindo felt that the Maharaja was too shrewd to take risks in such dangerous matters. See *Sri Aurobindo on Himself* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, 1953), pp. 96–7.

According to Pravrajika Atmaprana, Nivedita received a letter from Gaekwar on 23 October 1902 about which she was quite upset. See *Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1961, 1967, 1977), p. 150.

9. *Dedicated*, p. 269.

10. *Sister Nivedita*, p. 149.

11. *Sister Nivedita*, pp. 177–8.

12. *Long Journey Home*, (London: Rider and Co., 1975), p. 154. [emphasis added.]

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the last chapter of the book she later wrote, *The Master As I Saw Him*, and it is a chapter of gentleness and religious faith which make all implications of 'bomb-throwing revolutionary plans' so out of key as to be ludicrous.[13]

Lizelle Reymond, on the other hand, believes that ever since Nivedita's first meeting with Aurobindo at Baroda her involvement and participation in revolutionary politics, especially in Bengal, was deep and far-reaching. This view receives powerful support from Girijasankar Roychoudhury[14] and Sankari Prasad Basu[15] who, in their respective Bengali works on Nivedita, extend the Reymond thesis on the political activity of Nivedita. In view of such conflicting versions, it will be in the fitness of things to make an honest assessment of facts regarding the political and revolutionary activities of Nivedita.

II

Before the time Nivedita met Aurobindo in Baroda, there existed in Bengal a number of societies, mobilizing young men for national work, mainly of a cultural nature, namely, the Young Men's Hindu Union Committee, The Gita Society, The Dawn Society, The Anusilan Samiti, and the Vivekananda Society. Of these, the Dawn Society started by Satish Chandra Mukherjee and the Anusilan Samiti founded jointly by Satischandra Basu and Barrister P. Mitra, were more important in terms of commanding the following of young men. Nivedita was associated with all of these societies — more particularly with the Dawn — seeking to develop the physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual powers of young people with her inspiring lectures on 'Nation', 'Nationality' and 'National Consciousness'[16].

These societies were working more or less independently of each other in Bengal

13. *Long Journey Home*, p. 156.
14. Girijasankar Roychoudhury, *Bhagini Nivedita O Banglai Biplabbad* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Jijnasa, 1960).
15. Sankari Prasad Basu, *Nivedita Lokamata* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1987, 1988), vols. 2 and 3.
16. We know from Nivedita's letter dated 28 February 1906 and 2 May 1906 (*Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 791, 803), as well as notification issued by Satish Chandra in the November 1905 issue of the Society's magazine that Nivedita instituted in her Master's name a Gold Medal to be awarded to the young men writing the best essay on the subject of Nationality in a competition invited for the purpose. The themes suggested for the essay reflect Nivedita's passionate concern with the subject of nationality as well as with those topics on which she herself wrote untiringly throughout her life. Subjects for Theses for Vivekananda Gold Medal:
    1. That the work of the Indian Religious Teachers has always been more or less fruitful in some awakening of the national sense.
    2. That great men have a passionate love for the common people.
    3. That his country has a greater claim on a man than his family.
    4. That all the Indian peoples together form an organic unity. [This may be taken to mean that as the parts of the human body are all different from each other, and yet united to form a single organism, so there may be some such relationship among the Indian peoples.]
    5. That Hindu and Mohammedan life and thought are alike in many important characteristics, which distinguish them both from Western.
    6. That the lives of Asoka and Akbar, taken together, prove that in India the idea of democracy is essential to nationality. [Note: It will be understood that the word democracy carries with it the idea that everyone is free to develop himself to the utmost, regardless of his birth.]

    To quote Nivedita, 'I am down for another, a Vivekananda Medal for an essay to one of 6 or 7 others which have been an-

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and when Nivedita met Aurobindo in Baroda to tell him that 'Calcutta needs you, your place is in Bengal', she, in consistence with her theme of unity, might have thought that a leader like Aurobindo was necessary to bring about unity and coordination among these separately functioning groups. That Aurobindo, whose ultimate aim at this time was to stage an armed revolution all over India by making the necessary organizational preparation to this effect, himself thought of bringing these groups together and converting them to the revolutionary cause of fighting the British is evident from what he acknowledged as his thinking of this period:

> I found a number of small groups of revolutionaries that had recently sprung into existence, but all scattered and acting without reference to each other. I tried to unite them under a single organization with Barrister P. Mitra as the leader of the revolution in Bengal and a Central Council of five persons, one of them being Nivedita.[17]

The other members of the Central Council were P. Mitra (to function as the President of the Council), C.R. Das and Sri Aurobindo (Vice-Presidents), and Surendranath Tagore (Treasurer). The selection of members of the Council shows Nivedita's influence on Aurobindo at this time. Apart from P. Mitra and C.R. Das who practically selected themselves, the other member was Nivedita's ally, Surendranath Tagore, 'my precious boy'[18] as she used to call him.

The Central Council was, however, short-lived. It was found to be impossible to bring about an agreement between different groups especially in the absence of Aurobindo who was staying mostly at Baroda at this time.[19] In the absence of a Central Council, Jatindranath Banerjee, a soldier in the Baroda army whom Aurobindo had sent as his emissary to survey the 'Bengal scene', concentrated his energy towards strengthening the revolutionary society that he, on behalf of Aurobindo, established at 108, Upper Circular Road in Calcutta.[20] He was joined six months later by Barindra, the twenty-year-old younger brother of Aurobindo. Barindra's task was to organize in the villages of Bengal, a chain of *samitis* (societies) with a view to recruiting and training the young in the task of raising a revolution.[21] Sister Nivedita gave away to the Circular Road Society her collection of about one hundred and

nounced.... *Nationality* is the thought I am seeking by all means to popularise.' (*Letters*, vol. 2, p. 791.)

17. *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, p. 116.
18. *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 57.
19. It was only in 1905 that Aurobindo came to settle in Bengal as the Principal of the newly established National College.
20. It seems from the accounts of Hemchandra Kanungoe and Girijasankar Roychoudhury that the revolutionary Society at the Circular Road was established around the middle of 1902. Barindra joined it six months later. Debabrata Bose was another member of this Society. This Society broke up in the middle of 1903 due to a quarrel between Jatindra and Barindra. Girijasankar quotes Barindra to the following effect as to the reason for the dissolution of the Circular Road Society: 'Jatindranath, our first revolutionary leader and myself and Debabrata Bose quarrelled simply because we did not want Jatin with the proud abrupt military temperament to boss the show and brush us aside to a secondary position.' — *Bhagini Nivedita O Banglai Biplabbad*, p. 48.

    Hemchandra Kanungoe says that a false charge of moral depravity was brought against Jatindra by Barindra and at Barindra's instance, Aurobindo expelled Jatindra from the Society. Kanungoe also reports that a new 'centre' was since established by Barindra in Grey Street of Calcutta. This episode, according to Kanungoe, displeased Barrister P. Mitra leading him to leave the company of Aurobindo. — *Banglai Biplab Prachesh̄ta* (Calcutta: Chirayata Prakashan, 1984), p. 24.
21. *Dedicated*, pp. 283–4.

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fifty books including the volumes of *The Irish Revolution, The History of Mutiny, The American Wars of Independence, The History of the Dutch Republic, The Lives of Mazzini and Garibaldi, Tod's History of Rajasthan, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Ramayana and Mahabharata,* and the books on Indian economic history written by Dadabhai Naoroji, R.C. Dutt, such as *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* and *Economic History of India.* These books were given even before Barindra joined the Society. Nivedita's purpose in donating these books was to enable the Society to develop a *political school,* turning out students who, armed with ideas gleaned from such books, would spread the message of independence all over India.[22]

III

According to Atmaprana, Sister Nivedita's revolutionary work did not go much beyond *donating* and *inspiring:* 'Her collaboration, however, was only limited to presenting books to the Society and giving inspiring lectures to the young men to instil national fervour into them.'[23] In her Bengali work on the life of Nivedita — on which is based the work of Atmaprana, Pravrajika Muktiprana too had taken a similar stand.[24] Barbara Foxe echoes Atmaprana and Muktiprana when she writes that, 'Nivedita's role was chiefly confined to giving her books to the Anusilan Samiti; books which she thought might inspire them....'[25] Sumit Sarkar takes a similar stand when he observes that, 'the virtual absence of reference to Nivedita in the home political files' as well as the fact that she was never arrested by the police demonstrate 'the unimportance of Nivedita'[26]. In order to prove their *limited role* thesis vis-a-vis Nivedita, they quote Aurobindo to the effect that he and Nivedita ceased

22. For details, see Barindra Kumar Ghose, *Agniyug* (Calcutta: Book Corporation, B.S. 1355 [1947–1948]).
23. *Sister Nivedita,* p. 183.
24. *Bhagini Nivedita* (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1st edn., 1959, 1985), pp. 286–91.
25. *Long Journey Home,* p. 169. Foxe wrongly mentions the Circular Road Society as the Anusilan Samiti.
26. *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908* (Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973), p. 476; see footnote 52.

Nivedita, as we shall see later, was under police surveillance but no move was made by the police except watching her and opening her mail. She finds a mention in the report submitted on 22 April 1914 by C.A. Tegart, Special Superintendent of Police, Intelligence Branch. Tegart mentions in a general sort of way that Nivedita was a woman of ill-reputation, that she toured several parts of Bengal and lectured on Swadeshi movement, that she prayed for bail on behalf of Bhupendranath Dutta when he, as the Editor of *Yugantar,* was arrested on charge of spreading sedition, that she adopted *Bande Mataram* as the national cry, and that she was thought to be spreading the ideas of nationalism in India. For details, see Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Political Branch, Confidential Files and Government of Bengal, Political Department, Political Branch, Confidential Files as preserved in West Bengal State Archives. See also West Bengal State Committee for Compilation of Freedom Fight Movement in India, Bengal Region, *Paper 45, Bundle 15: A Note on the Ramakrishna Mission* and *Paper 49, Bundle 15: Political Activities of the Sadhus up to 1909.*

To quote an excerpt from the *Note on the Ramakrishna Mission* (Paper 45): 'She [Nivedita] was a staunch advocate of Swadeshi movement, adopted *Bande Mataram* as national cry. She toured several parts of Bengal and lectured on Swadeshi movement. In 1909 [1903] she went to Midnapore, delivered lectures on politics through the medium of religion continually for five days attracting thereby increasing number of audience. She encouraged the society by personal demonstration of sword play and other athletic exercises, presented works of Mazzini and Prince Kropot-

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to consult each other about the revolutionary movement after the Central Council ceased to exist:

> I had no occasion to meet Nivedita after [i.e. the lapse of the Central Council] until I settled in Bengal as Principal of the National College and the chief editorial writer of the *Bande Mataram*.[27]

It may be pointed out that in the letters written between 1903 and 1905, Nivedita does not mention Aurobindo even obliquely. Had there been any contact between the two in the period mentioned above, Nivedita must have made some mention of that in her letters. If it is argued that the police were watching her and opening her letters, and that might have prevented her from mentioning Aurobindo even remotely, it could be said in counter argument that despite the fact of police watching her, she kept on mentioning Okakura[28] in the period of her contact with him and in the years afterwards by various code names. Nivedita could have done the same in the case of Aurobindo, had she really something to say about him during the period. The fact that she did not, proves the veracity of Aurobindo's statement.

It should be pointed out, at the same time, that Aurobindo's statement only proves that there was no occasion for consultation between Nivedita and Aurobindo in the conduct of the revolutionary movement between the lapse of the Central Council in 1903 and the coming of Aurobindo to Bengal as the Principal of the National College in 1905. The *statement* does not simultaneously prove that Nivedita's participation in revolutionary politics did not go beyond donating books and delivering inspiring lectures and that *it* was limited and confined to *that* and *that* only. Between later 1902 and till his coming to Bengal in 1905, Aurobindo was mainly based in Baroda and Nivedita in Calcutta, and it was naturally and physically impossible for them to meet or consult each other. More important, they did not need to meet or consult each other. Aurobindo had his representatives in

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kin.' — See *Nivedita Lokamata*, vol. 2, p. 190.

Hemchandra Kanungoe, a revolutionary himself, published an account of Nivedita's Midnapore tour in the Paush 1329 issue of the *Basumati*. Nivedita herself talks about her Midnapore tour and lecture there in her letter of 20 May 1903: 'Last week I missed writing, because I had gone away lecturing to Midnapore.... I think my work in Midnapore was of some use. I spoke 12 or 13 times in 5 days. When one can do this sort of thing it is generally of some value. I think, however little. But ... I am told that the boys find it so difficult to understand my lectures. They pass over their heads, I try to use all instruments, but I see very plainly that I cannot come directly in contact with the people. I have to find channels — to speak through others — and the ideas become modified. I thought to turn the world upside down, so strong was the life that I felt within me and I am crying to the winds, and only the winds take up and echo my cry — ah Swamiji! — and you had such a trust in me!' — *Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 568–9. There is no mention, however, in Nivedita's letter about the sword play etc.

As for the non-arrest of Nivedita, perhaps the most sensible explanation comes from Barbara Foxe, when she observes: 'If the police were watching her, and they undoubtedly were, they must have regarded her friends as a very mixed bag: revolutionaries, extremists, liberals, moderates, and non-political monks. Anybody, in fact, who was sincerely concerned with the welfare of India. It would have been easy to arrest her. They saw no point in doing so. — *Long Journey Home*, p. 170.

27. *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, p. 116.

28. The Japanese artist Okakura came to India in January 1902 and stayed on till September that year to organize secret revolutionary activities against the British Government in India.

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Calcutta: Jatindranath and Aurobindo's own brother Barindra. We have it from the evidence of Barindra as given in his book *Agniyug* that Nivedita had it agreed with Jatindranath before she donated her books to the Circular Road Society. After Jatindranath and Barindra broke up with each other, she worked mainly through Barindra.

Barindra claims in his book just mentioned that *Nivedita was connected with their secret society ever since her first Baroda visit and that this contact remained intact till her demise.* It is on the testimony and reminiscences of persons such as Barindra Ghose, Ganen Maharaj, Bhupendranath Dutta (the younger brother of Swami Vivekananda), Ramananda Chattopadhyaya (the editor of *Modern Review* for which Nivedita wrote incessantly), the Tagores of Jorasanko, and Professor Benoy Sarkar that Lizelle Reymond based her account of Nivedita's revolutionary involvement.[29] Reymond met and interviewed these persons in Calcutta during her visit to the city in 1938.[30] Since Barindra Ghose kept himself underground at that time, she could not meet him personally, but was able to secure his written notes through Ganen Maharaj. During the late forties and the early fifties, when India became independent, Reymond was able to establish her open contact with Barindra Ghose, becoming in the process able to get his account of Nivedita's collaboration with them.

Among her non-Indian contacts, Reymond mentions,[31] in particular, Miss Josephine MacLeod, Mrs. Ratcliffe and Mr. S.K. Ratcliffe (the former editor of *The Statesman*, Calcutta) — all of whom were very intimate friends of Nivedita. Nivedita's voluminous letters, most of which were written to Miss MacLeod, were secured by Reymond directly from Miss MacLeod when she met her in England in 1937. Apart from handing over Nivedita's letters to Reymond, Miss MacLeod gave her account as to how Nivedita, brought up in the revolutionary tradition of Ireland, worked for a similar purpose in India and as to how she herself had cheerfully borne the expense of her work in India, especially during the period of Nivedita-Okakura collaboration in India. S.K. Ratcliffe, a regular visitor to Nivedita's Baghbazar house, especially on Sunday mornings, reported to Reymond that Nivedita had certain boys, totally devoted to her and that she collected her information through these boys whom she managed to place in various sensitive spots. Ganen Maharaj, who was with Nivedita as the Mission-accredited attendant of Nivedita, especially in the last days of her life, was very emphatic in pointing out that Barindra worked for Nivedita.

We know from Sankari Prasad Basu[32] that Reymond had in her collection *two* letters and *one* note from Barindra. In the *first letter* dated 18 August 1939, Barindra was for obvious reasons (India was then under British rule) very cautious in his observations of Nivedita's revolutionary connections. He acknowledged in that letter that Nivedita was connected with the efforts to establish societies in Bengal, especially with the one sought to be established by Okakura. So far as her connection with the revolutionary work of the Barindra group was concerned, Nivedita, according to the August 1939 letter of Barindra, worked with them mainly as an enthusiastic supporter and not as an *active* worker.

29. Though Reymond herself does not mention in her book these sources, we know from Jean Herbert's 'Preface' to *The Dedicated* that such indeed were the sources Reymond drew upon to reconstruct her account of Nivedita's revolutionary involvement. — See *The Dedicated*, pp. vi–vii.

30. See Sankari Prasad Basu, *Nivedita Lokamata*, vol. 2, p. 29.

31. Reymond mentioned these in her letters to Sankari Prasad Basu. See *Nivedita Lokamata*, p. 28. See also Jean Herbert's 'Preface' to *The Dedicated*, pp. vi–vii.

32. *Nivedita Lokamata*, vol. 2, pp. 187–8.

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Barindra also acknowledged in this letter the fact of his intermittent meetings with Nivedita. Barindra concluded this letter with paying his profound regards to Nivedita as a flaming fighter who, in his opinion, was nothing less than 'a pure fire'. In the *note*[33], Barindra informed Reymond of Nivedita's political connection with P. Mitra, C.R. Das, Surendranath Tagore, Bepin Chandra Pal, and Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyaya of the Dawn Society. The *note* acknowledged the multifaceted nature of Nivedita's efforts to inspire the revolutionary fervour of the youth through lectures, personal contacts and writings. In the *second letter* dated 4 May 1952, Barindra, no longer under the compulsion to write with a cautious tone (since India was independent now), openly admits that Nivedita was intimately connected with their 'Yugantar' group and that *she* was the source of their inspiration. He also recognized now the fact that Nivedita's writings had an enormous influence on the young revolutionaries in terms of exciting their efforts towards 'actualising' a revolution against the British Raj in India.

Reymond had taken great pains in throwing light for the first time ever on the life of Nivedita — her political life in particular. Unfortunately, she did not disclose in her book the sources from which she drew her materials. Had she mentioned her *sources*, especially her interviews and correspondence with the former revolutionaries such as Barindra Ghose, then her statements on the political activities of Nivedita which she made in her book, *The Dedicated*, would have been less questioned. The fact that she did not do so gave rise to suspicion and even the charge that the account of Nivedita's political activities given in her book was 'groundless'[34].

33. This hand-written note by Barindra was undated.

34. *Sister Nivedita*, p. 184. In a similar vein, Sumit Sarkar terms Reymond's account of Nivedita's revolutionary work as romantic and legendary.

IV

Having disclosed the point that the account that Reymond gave of Nivedita's politics in her book was, after all, not groundless, we will now see exactly what was presented by Reymond as Nivedita's revolutionary connections. To quote Reymond:

> Five years after Margaret Noble's arrival in India ... Nivedita was now filling an appointed place within the Indian Nationalist Organization which had its headquarters in Bengal. Aurobindo Ghose, in spite of his absence, was the organization's chief leader. Nivedita's work of propaganda was done largely, at this time, through the medium of her 'Sunday breakfasts', and in her contacts with the students of the actively revolutionary 'Dawn Society'.[35]
>
> At the Sunday breakfasts there would always be a few students hovering about her, hoping to help her and the work, in some way: to carry a message, to act as guide for a stranger in Calcutta, to translate a Bengali text. How she loved these young people! 'Are they not my reserve capital?' she said proudly.... The most enthusiastic and fearless of these young men was Barindra Ghose, just arrived from Baroda, where for the past two years he had been undergoing initiation by the brother Aurobindo into his future work. He was twenty years old. He had first seen Swami Vivekananda when he was fifteen. He was all afire with zeal.
>
> 'I came to Calcutta with the idea of preaching the cause of independence, as a political missionary. Nothing shall stop me!' he declared.
>
> 'Good!' Nivedita replied, showing no surprise at this pugnacious attitude. 'Your aim is noble; but — are you ready? Remember, you are not born for yourself but for your neighbour, for your own kind, for humanity in the sum.'
>
> 'Yes, on condition that you are our Joan of Arc!' he answered. 'That you show us the way.

35. *Dedicated*, p. 280.

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We need you. Let us march behind you and all will be well, even if we don't know where your banner leads. Give your orders. We will work together, even if you are in Calcutta and I am in the villages of Bengal.'

There was a pleading, and at the same time almost threatening, note in his voice. Like thousands of other young men to whom Nivedita had spoken during her travels, Barindra Ghose was seeking comrades who would constitute a unified group. He was impatient. Nivedita reassured him:

'If you are still isolated, I will help you. That is why I am here. The leaders are here, too, but the work of the pioneers will be hard. I know fellow captains and fellow crewmen, to toil along the same lines and exchange ideas to good effect. Take heart! The way is opening before you.'[36]

This conversation between Nivedita and Barindra as quoted by Reymond proves several things: First, it proves that Reymond did not present Nivedita as a Mother of Revolution or as a Joan of Arc. That title was attributed to her by persons such as Barindra Ghose who sought guidance from her in revolutionary matters to which she responded by saying '*I am here to help you*'. To say that the presentation of Nivedita as Joan of Arc was 'romantic' and 'implausible'[37] was tantamount to denying the testimony of revolutionaries such as Barindra Ghose. Secondly, it proves that Reymond never intended to magnify the revolutionary role and leadership of Nivedita at the expense of Aurobindo. She was scrupulous enough to emphatically point out that Aurobindo Ghose and *not* Nivedita was the *chief leader* of the revolutionary organization. For Girijasankar Roychoudhury's[38] presentation of Aurobindo's revolutionary party as Sister Nivedita's party or of Nivedita as the real director of the working of the revolutionary party founded by Aurobindo, the fault lies in the over-enthusiasm of Roychoudhury and *not* with Reymond.

Thirdly, Nivedita's assurance to Barindra towards helping him by finding the appropriate connections for him — '*I will help you. That is why I am here.... I know fellow captains and fellow crewmen, to toil along the same lines and exchange ideas to good effect*' — shows that she indeed had some active connection with the movement for militant nationalism and that her sympathies with it were not confined or limited merely to the intellectual plane. The upholders of the 'limited role' thesis all quote Sri Aurobindo (*Sri Aurobindo on Himself*) in support of their contention. And yet it is on the authority of Sri Aurobindo himself as recorded in Niradbaran's *Sri Aurobinder Sange Kathavarta*[39] (Conversations with Sri Aurobindo) that Bimanbehari Majumdar takes on the 'limited role' hypothesis. To quote him:

> The hypothesis goes positively against the direct testimony of Sri Aurobindo, who described her [Nivedita] as one of the active lead-

36. *Dedicated*, pp. 282–3.
37. For Sumit Sarkar's carping criticism of Nivedita as Joan of Arc, see *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908*, p. 475.
38. Girijasankar Roychoudhury, *Sri Aurobindo O Banglai Swadeshi Yuga*, (Bengali), (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1956). Girijasankar wrote (translation ours) that Aurobindo never taught his group either the 'organization' or the 'strategy', because he did not know either; Sister Nivedita taught the group these things (p. 532). Girijasankar further opines that 'it would not be an exaggeration to call Aurobindo's revolutionary party Sister Nivedita's party' (p. 533), because 'Nivedita had directed in practice the working of the secret society that Aurobindo had at his hand, from first to last. Nivedita knew the techniques of the secret society much better than Aurobindo did' (p. 726). This picture of Nivedita seems to be a little overdrawn. For details as to the techniques adopted by Nivedita, see *Bhagini Nivedita O Banglai Biplabbad*, pp. 118–20.
39. Entry dated 21 January 1939.

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ers of the revolutionary movement. Her *Kali the Mother* appeared to Sri Aurobindo as a book inspiring people to take recourse to revolution. She approached not only the Gaekwar of Baroda but also the Chiefs of Rajputana with a view to enlisting their cooperation for the cause of Militant Nationalism.[40]

Apart from providing an inkling into Nivedita's revolutionary connections through the conversation between Nivedita and Barindra which took place in 1903 and which we have referred to and analysed above, Reymond presents the following other evidences of continued connection between Nivedita and Barindra. This is how she describes the happenings of a mid-day in 1905:

> Barindra Ghose acted as link between the city and country centres. One day he found himself without money, and with a serious responsibility to meet, and he hurried to Bagh Bazar to Nivedita to ask assistance. It was high noon. She came out to see who was there, and did not recognize him in the blinding light.
>
> 'Who is it?'
>
> 'Your Barin, we are lost! No money! What is to be done?'
>
> 'First do not beg! Money will come through work....'[41]

We have confirmation in the letter that Barindra wrote to Reymond on 18 August 1939 that such indeed was the conversation between Nivedita and him.[42] This shows that young revolutionaries like Barindra felt free to frequent the Baghbazar residence of Nivedita whenever they were in need of something — advice, material assistance or help in some other form. 'Her house,' observes Reymond, 'was a refuge with food, money, and maps for those who had to escape.'[43]

In March 1906 Barindra along with associates such as Bhupendranath Dutta, Abinash Bhattacharji and Upendranath Banerjee brought out a paper called *Yugantar*[44] as the mouthpiece of the revolutionary group. Reymond presents the relation between Nivedita and *Yugantar* in the following terms:

> Now the *Yugantar* was immediately recognized as 'the revolutionaries' catechism'. It had announced its motto as that of complete spiritual freedom — the political freedom of the country being merely an aspect of this.
>
> 'That idea,' said Nivedita, 'you have got from my guru! Very good! Give it any form you like in your columns — it is what the crowd will demand very soon!'[45]

The *Yugantar* became so popular that early in 1907 its circulation reached the figure of fifty thousand. *Yugantar*, however, had to pay soon for its phenomenal success. In July 1907, its editor Bhupendranath Dutta was arrested for publishing what the Government called seditious articles.[46] What Nivedita did on hearing the arrest of Bhupendranath

40. *Militant Nationalism in India* (Calcutta: General Printers and Publishers, 1966), pp. 57–8.
41. *Dedicated*, p. 314.
42. See *Nivedita Lokamata*, vol. 2, p. 188.
43. *Dedicated*, p. 336.
44. According to Bhupendranath Dutta, it was he who had selected the name. — See *Bharater Tritiya Swadhinatar Sangram* (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1983), p. 25.

    According to Girijasankar, the plan to bring out *Yugantar* was hatched in the house of Nivedita herself through: (a) the organization of revolutionary societies, (b) guerilla warfare, and (c) armed uprising with the help of native soldiers all over the country. — See *Bhagini Nivedita O Banglai Biplabbad*, pp. 85–6.
45. *Dedicated*, pp. 325–6.
46. According to Girijasankar, of the two 'seditious' articles for which Bhupendranath was arrested, the one was published on 7 April and the other on 5 May 1907. The second article called Englishmen demons. — See *Bhagini Nivedita O Banglai Biplabbad*, p. 130.

    According to the *Sedition (Rowlatt) Committee Report, 1918*, *Yugantar* (New Era) exhibited a burning hatred of the British race, breathed revolution in every line, and pointed out how revolution was to be executed in India. — See p. 22 of the *Report*.

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shows the intense feelings she had for her young followers, feelings which find poignant expression in the following representation of Reymond:

> Nivedita hurried to the judges and learned that a bail of ten thousand rupees was needed, and that Bhupendranath's friends had vainly sought to raise the money.
>
> 'I've got it in my bank!' she cried, 'Take it all! I will beg in order to replace it.'[47]

And to keep up the spirit of young Bhupendranath, condemned to one year of hard labour in prison, Nivedita said to him, 'Bhupen, remember you belong to Mother India. Keep that love undaunted. Do not build a family; you are to belong to the country.'[48] As regards those other members of the *Yugantar* staff who were also arrested, it was now the task of Nivedita to look after their women and children. For such act of beneficence towards Bhupendranath and others, Nivedita earned the intense displeasure of the British government[49] — a displeasure to which the *Englishman* gave expression by calling her 'a traitor to her race'[50].

V

Did Nivedita's revolutionary connections go so far as to involve her in the manufacture of bombs in the Muraripukur Road Laboratory? Did she go to the extent of helping youthful bomb-makers to get access to the laboratories of Presidency College, Calcutta, as assistants of Dr. J.C. Bose and Dr. P.C. Roy, the two professors of the College? Reymond answers, as the following quote shows, both questions in the affirmative:

> She [Nivedita] did not remain un-implicated in the manufacture of bombs in the Muraripukur Road Laboratory, and she was constantly helping the friends of Barindra Ghose. Hem Chandra Das had been sent to France to investigate the technique of explosives, but before he came back, Ullaskar Dutt had, after many dangerous experiments, stumbled on the method of making melanite.
>
> Nivedita did not hesitate to help these amateur chemists as best she could. Daringly, she smuggled them into the laboratories of Presidency College as assistants to Jagadish Bose and P.C. Roy, who was Professor of Chemistry. Both needed laboratory aides. Both were of course quite unaware of Nivedita's audacity in the matter of providing them. P.C. Roy ... knew very well that some of his keener students were working late, with the help of the assistants, but he asked no questions. The only trouble was that they used too much acid.... Professor Roy often tidied up after them, and cleaned the blackboard carefully. But he never made any comment. How grateful to him she was![51]

Since this particular part of Reymond's statement relating to the smuggling of young bomb-makers into the laboratories of Presidency College has given rise to fierce criticism, it will be appropriate to see what *sources* Reymond had for making such observations about Nivedita. We know from the letters that Reymond wrote to Sankari Prasad Basu that Reymond's chief source of information in this regard was Ramananda Chattopadhyaya, the editor of *Modern Review* and a close friend of Nivedita who knew Nivedita really well and for a long time at that.[52] Reymond asserted in the same letter written to Basu that Ganen Maharaj too had reported the same thing to her. Having disclosed her sources, Reymond went on to observe that Nivedita was intelligent enough to carry on the works of organi-

47. *Dedicated*, p. 338.
48. *Dedicated*, p. 338.
49. Nivedita herself came to know the following accusation against her: 'I hear that I am down in the annals of the C.I.D. as having been the inspirer of *Yugantar*.' *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 1016; letter dated 30 September 1909.
50. Sankari Prasad Basu, 'Sister Nivedita: A Chronology' in *Letters*, vol. 1, p. [44]. See also Bhupendranath Dutta, *Vivekananda — Patriot Prophet*, p. 115 quoted in *Sister Nivedita*, p. 213.
51. *Dedicated*, pp. 336–7.
52. *Nivedita Lokamata*, vol. 2, p. 31.

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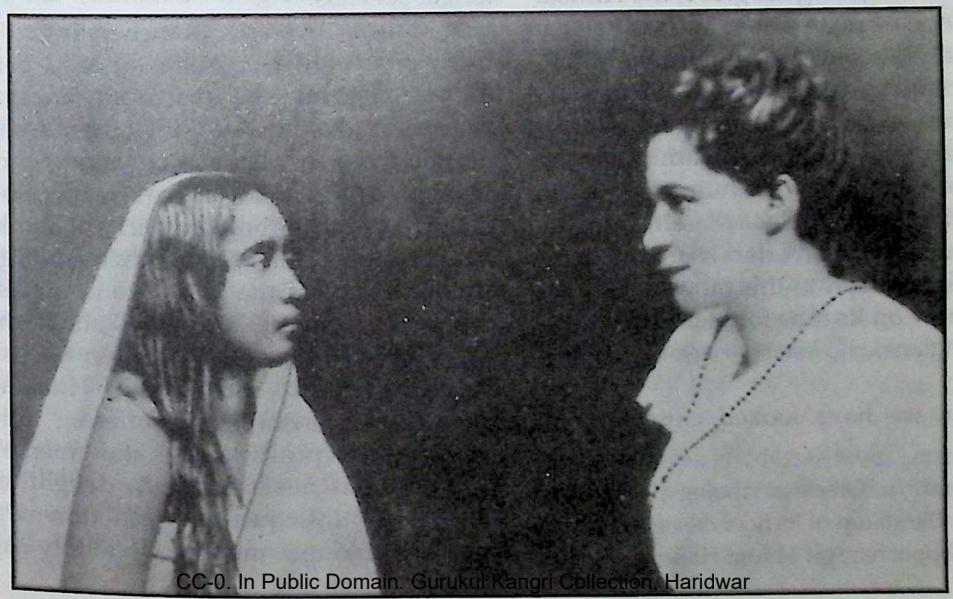
zation secretly. She knew well that the best places for carrying on the clandestine activities were the government institutions, because they were generally free from the watchful eyes of the government. Such methods of carrying on the secret revolutionary work, Reymond observed, is well established also among the Irish revolutionaries in England among whom Nivedita had once the occasion to work.[53]

VI

It is difficult to say with certainty *to what extent* Nivedita was involved in revolutionary politics. She was involved, but *how deeply*, no one can say with absolute certainty. There will be debates and controversies therefore on this. We can only say that wedded as Nivedita was to the cult of strength and fearlessness, she had no aversion to the culture of the bomb. She believed that there were many ways of fighting the enemy, that 'England yields nothing without bombs'[54], that freedom had to be wrested from the British Raj and, if necessary, paid in maximum sacrifices by some dedicated men.

Before we end this discussion on the revolutionary involvement of Nivedita, two points should be emphatically made. The first is that her revolutionism included support to secret societies, guerilla warfare and armed uprising, but did not extend to terrorism which included secret assassinations and what was euphemistically called the 'swadeshi' dacoities. It is on record that she had very curtly refused to lend her revolver for any such purpose.[55] The second point is regarding her characteristic style of functioning: she knew how to stay behind the scenes and issue guidance therefrom. And if she was a general at all, she was one who knew how to keep out of sight of 'the enemy'. Her training in the Sinn Fein movement of Ireland had taught her such style of functioning effectively without raising the suspicion of the police and other governmental agencies. This was the 'secret' behind her 'non-arrest' in British India, despite the complexity of her involvement in the revolutionary politics of the country. ❐

53. Ibid.
54. *Dedicated*, p. 327.
55. See *Militant Nationalism in India*, p. 176. See also *Bhagini Nivedita*, p. 287.



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Sister Nivedita along with Sri Sarada Devi

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The Himalayas — Its Terrors and Fascinations

B. N. SIKDAR

This is an account of the myriad fascinating — and terrifying too — aspects of the magic mountain that is the Himalayas. In this world of Maya, such opposites coexist in an alluring and inexplicable way. This King of Mountains — the delight of many who love adventure, art, life forms, the majestic nature all around, snow-clad peaks, play of light and shade, silence, inwardness and spiritual inspiration — has its Himalayan terrors as well, as the learned author correctly points out in this article with high literary flavour. The firefly in its love of light embraces the flame and gives up its life even; but it must. So also, he gets the best from this King of Mountains who seeks the fascinations while embracing undaunted the terrors as well.

I

On the map of Asia it looks a long , wide smudge, stretching eastward and westward for about 2500 kilometres, separated by the lower Pamir range from the Hindukush group. It reminds us of the Pegasus[1] about to fly into heavens with wings (Tibet and India) outspread; or, the blade of a giant's scimitar. It cuts through the heart (India, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet) of earth's biggest continent; of mountain ranges it is the reigning sovereign (Kalidasa's *nagādhirāja),* as Lord Shiva is of deities.

Even on a geological globe, the Himalayas take one's breath away: such is its span latitudinally as well as longitudinally (70°-100°). Westward, the Hindukush slopes in a sixty-degree angle downward to the shore of the Arabian Sea. In reality the Himalayas constitute the most splendid humps on earth; neither the Mont Blanc Massif, nor the Rockies, nor any other, offers so many shades of beauties or terrors as this range does; it has carried snow on its tops for eternity, whence its name (Sanskrit: *hima* — snow; *ālaya* — abode).

When we have looked closely at the globe, three almost parallel chains of mountains are discernible, called variously: (1) The Greater Himalayas; (2) The Middle or Inner; and (3) The Outer or Lower. The first of these rise to dizzy, ever-clouded tops like Kanchenjunga and Mount Everest (which is the highest spot on earth), Lhotse, Makalu, Cho Oyn and others. Some authorities also include the Hindukush range and call them the Lesser Himalayas as 'enclosing the noted Vale of Jammu and Kashmir.' There was a time when the Himalayas formed almost an insuperable barrier between Tibet and India. It is no longer so. Alas!

Mount Everest, Kanchenjunga and many others are ever white; for most part of the year, fog and snow obscure all landmarks in parts of the Greater Himalayas; in every portion there are plenty of crevasses, gorges, sheer precipices and foaming streams. So this range is dear to the boldest spirits of mankind (e.g., Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay). A climber enters the 'death-zone' when he crosses its frontier 5300 metres above mean sea level where the air is too thin to sustain life. The celestial sublimity of Himalayan panorama is unsurpassed, offering unique perspective of peaks, valleys and greenery.

Terror is never far from delight, avalanches not infrequently crash downward; they are among a mountain's wildly capri-

1. Pegasus: In Greek mythology, a winged horse; the stamp of its hoof created the fountain Hippocrene on Mount Helicon.

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cious killers. In the Alps there slide thousands of avalanches of varying sizes every year, causing 100 or more fatalities. In the far vaster Himalayan range, they obliterate villages and plantations. The noise is ear-splitting when they thunder, hiss or glide down slopes. When the slope is steep and long enough, a heavy slab of ice can accelerate to even more than 150 kilometres per hour. The air pressure generated by a big mass of ice will level pines and deodars, or cause concrete buildings to explode.

Nature's ways in the Himalayas are wayward and unpredictable. The vast forests at the foot of the Inner Range abound in herbs and plants of medicinal properties; among their tangled vegetation exists exotic animal life — large spiders, the leopard, the brown bear, the shaggy yak, the sturdy sambar, the (now rare) musk-deer, the wild ass (now almost extinct), the rare goat antelope, the unique cedar-deodar (some centuries old), disease-carrying insects, and all sorts of vicious and venomous creatures. On the other hand vales of flowers (including one of Brahma-Kamal) have enchanted tourists/climbers from East and West over the ages. The grandest scene, however, unfolds at sunrise as the pink sun peeps over the horizon and the eminences magically change hues from dark-brown to green, to blue, to emerald, to pearl, to deepest purple.

Really, the awesome splendour of the Himalayas present an infinite variety.

II

The epochal geological landmark appeared in consequence of a cataclysmic convulsion 100 kms. beneath the earth's surface. About 4500 million years ago, as the earth — one of the many bits of the sun — cooled, the lighter element in the molten interior floated to the surface and hardened into an outer crust in which appeared seas, rivers, lakes, mountains, land, creatures, trees, etc. ages later. Last to appear was a puny wide-brained biped. Modern geology says that sections of the earth's crust called tectonic plates float on a layer of semi-molten material about 100 kms. beneath us. The earth's actions caused displacement of these plates and one such movement caused the supreme event which forced up the Himalayas like Aphrodite[2] out of the foam of the sea. (It is not rhetoric, fossils of sea-plants and sea-creatures have been discovered on the range when the overlying ice got shifted on account of other disturbances.) The moment was terrific, a time when

> The stars threw down their spears
> And watered heaven with their tears.[3]

Thunders and lightnings played round and round, and carried rain for thousands of kilometres. Poets have ever found delight to imagine the awesome mind-boggling event.

Consider the following verses in *Paradise Lost* at the point Satan and Abidel confronted:

> ... as if in earth
> winds underground or waters
> forcing way
> Sidelong, has pushed a mountain
> from his seat
> Half-sunk with all his pines ....

Also,

> ... heaven and earth
> Rose one of chaos ....
> When God said,
> 'Be gathered now ye waters under heaven,
> Into one place, and let dry land appear!'
> Immediately the mountains huge appear,
> Emergent, and their broad bare backs
> upheave
> Into the clouds, their tops ascend the sky.
> (VII; 282)

Actually it is not Behemoth but a mountain range which is 'biggest born of earth'.

P.B. Shelley's supreme work *Prometheus Unbound* resounds with many tunes — pipe, flute, cymbal, bass, etc. The mountain is thus represented in it —

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2. The Greek goddess of love. According to *Hesiod* she sprang from the foam *(aphros)* of the sea.
3. William Blake, *The Tiger.*

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My imperial mountains crowned
with cloud, snow, and fire,
My sea-like forests ...
(Act III, Sc. III)

To the temperamental poet, Lord Byron, high mountains were 'a feeling' that 'stirred the feeling infinite'; the seer-poet, William Wordsworth, 'the mountain and the deep and gloomy wood,/Their colours and their forms were .../An appetite ...' (*Tintern Abbey*). John Ruskin praised the mountains that they were 'the beginning and end of all natural scenery' (*Modern Painters*, vol. 3, pt. iv, ch. 12). The Prophet as well as Jesus the Christ went to the mountains for meditation and enlightenment and won them. In ancient times the glades and forests of the Himalayas reverberated with chants, here was laid the foundation of Hinduism's most cherished and subtle Upanishads, its forests were lit up by a thousand sacrificial fires.

The Abode of Snow in his immensity, grandeur and antiquity is as evocative as poetry.

III

Legends galore have grown round the huge range. Somewhat aloof in isolated grandeur, on the northern edge, overlooking Manas Sarovar's sacred waters, stands Mount Kailas believed by orthodox Hindus to be the dwelling of Shiva and his consort Parvati (Sanskrit: the daughter of the Mountain, which is the Himalaya). From a distance, on a clear day, the peak really looks a massive human head with curly, matted hair falling to the shoulders. In order to liberate the souls of his forefathers reduced to ashes by the anger of Kapila *Muni* (sage), the prince-ascetic Bhagiratha performed *tapasya* (penance and prayer through arduous rituals) for years and years until goddess Ganga was pleased to descend to earth from heaven. If her torrents were to hit the earth directly, the earth would shatter. So the prince had to do more *tapasya* to please Lord Shiva enough to agree to let him receive Ganga on his head. Shiva's matted hair was such a heap that Ganga could not find a way out. Further ardours by Bhagiratha induced Shiva to release the waters. After more hurdles Ganga was guided to the plains of northern India in a south-easterly direction, finally to fall into the Bay of Bengal through a score of tributaries. Eleven large rivers (Yamuna, Sone, Gomti, Gogra, Gandak, Kosi and others) join it in its course. Bhagiratha, by all accounts, must have been an expert engineer who knew the shape and contour of this portion of the vast range thoroughly.

Every race creates legends sometimes overstepping the limitation of reality, appropriate to its heritage and appetites: the oldest legends in the continents after/before the invention of agriculture, e.g., the Greek's Golden Fleece; the Roman's story of a she-wolf nursing Remus and Romulus; the Tenton's Beowa; the Centaur of the Mongols, to cite at random. One of the Hindu mythologies says that Lord Vishnu saved earth from submerging in the sea by supporting it in the form of a huge tortoise *(kūrma)*. Incidentally, there is a rock in Karnataka botanical-geological garden — a big piece of smooth and coal-black rock (the oldest rock in the world) — looking exactly like the back of the amphibian creature.

A mountain is a mine of imagination, few are there quarrying more than the Himalayas. Some early maps of the west showed giant elephants supporting earth on their back.

IV

The latest guess on the appearance of the mountain ranges took shape during the past 35 years; this is called tectonic mechanism. As the earth (a bit of the sun) began to cool, lighter elements in the semi-molten material about 100 kms. beneath our feet floated to the surface and hardened. This formed the outer crust. This crust consists of about eight large plates and more smaller ones, which swim on the surface, travelling in various directions on

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account of the globe's variable/varied movements. When places on which the land masses rest collide and the colliding edges go up, heat generates, pressure builds up, sediments at the bottom of oceans get stirred up. This steam and hot lava force their way through the crust; volcanoes (e.g., Fuji, Vesuvius, Stromboli, Etna) erupt scattering molten lava which ruins many kilometres around (see Charles Kingley's *The Last Days of Pompeii*). The geologists say that originally there were three continents — Asia, Europe and North America (as called now). This land was spaced out roughly along the equator. About 400 million years ago the tectonic plates under the land-mass began to separate and the three continents came into being. About 200 million years later they again floated towards one another, then edges collided, sometimes violently and went up forming the mountain chains. The first advance made Africa bump against Europe, the consequence of which were the Caledonian and Ural ranges. Australia was the last continent to separate from Antarctica. About 120 million years ago, India broke off from Africa and swiftly brushed against the central Asian high plateau 50 million years later. Our grand Himalayas emerged in the map of the globe. Such a staggering stroke by Nature was responsible for the Abode of Snow.

However Nature was kind too, or the tiny, wide-brained biped called *man* would not be here today. The ice on the peaks of a range melted and frothing streams/lakes/lagoons/rivers were born, eroded the rock, deposited the sediment through ages, created and fertilized plains, provided food and drink to the creatures on the outer crust. Tagore called the twin rivers Jahnavi-Yamuna 'exuding compassion' (*jāhnavī-yamunā vigalita karuṇā*) in one of his songs. Another poet of Bengal, D.L. Roy, called the rivers 'pearl necklaces' on Mother India's breast (*bakshe duliche muktār hār pañca sindhu yamunā gaṅgā*). The rivers/rivulets bear inland commerce and increase productivity, siphon off flood water; the Nile is the heart of Egypt even now, if it halted its flow, the country would die of starvation. The Irrawaddy is a great Asian highway, so are Europe's Rhine, Danube, Volga and Po, and China's Yellow River, not to mention many others; each has its source in the mountain chains. Along their shore downstream, ancient capitals with their wealth of temples, churches, mosques and gurudwaras, stretch. The Burmese claim that there were once four million pagodas in Pagan on the Irrawaddy, the Hindus, that hundreds of temples at Varanasi on the Ganga were demolished by fanatically religious emperors. The Taj Mahal stands on the Yamuna; The Badrinath and Kedarnath temples in the lap of the Lower Himalayas close to streams that downstream unite in the Ganga, which descends to the plains at Haridwar (*Hari* — Vishnu, *dwar* — door). To the Ganga the Hindu goes 'as a child to its mother'. By Varanasi alone the Ganga takes a right northern course and then again veers to the southeast. She traverses about 2,500 kms. having met the Yamuna at Allahabad and been swollen by her, then by the mighty Brahmaputra at Goulundo in Bangladesh before merging into the stormy Bay of Bengal — an eternal symbol of India's age-old culture; around her 'are intertwined her [India's] racial memories, her hopes and fears.' (Jawaharlal Nehru in *Testament*.)

V

There is a dreamspot nestling in one of the folds of the western Himalayas and there is, as usual, a legend. The heart of the place is Srinagar (City of Splendour) about 1,600 metres above sea-level. The largest and loveliest of all valleys in the Himalayas, Ladakh in its north-west is full of ancient Buddhist monasteries. Originally, this vale was a deep lake hemmed in by jagged peaks until, as the legend goes, the sage Kashyapa in the course of his wanderings arrived and punched a tunnel (now Bannihel Binpil), drained the lake and gave it his name — Kashmir. Geographically

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it is a valley of the Jhelum River — one of the five channels of the Indus. Kashmir was formerly world-renowned for years for its Shalimar Gardens, shawls, carpets and for the fairest women in the sub-continent. Later, it was again partly filled up by water spurting from melting glacier. Invading armies from the north-west surged through passes like Khyber and Balu to swoop down on India, to kill and pillage, to conquer and burn. But that makes a different sad tale; long-ruined temples dot the valleys of other rivers that traverse North India out of the King of Mountains, and rivalling the Ganga in sacredness and length is the Brahmaputra (Son of Brahma). Arising from the Manas Sarovar in southern Tibet (China), it flows east and then, cutting a gorge, bends down to pass by or through Arunachal, Meghalaya, Assam, Bangladesh to disport into the Bay of Bengal. Other mighty streams like Yamuna and Meghna swell its turbulent waters. Their watery filaments too overflow during the monsoon and deposit alluvial gold.

The Yamuna, herself a noble Himalayan outpouring, has blue water and at the confluence with her sister of brown water — the Ganga — she does not mingle and lose identity for quite half a kilometre. This *sangam* (confluence) is one of the holiest places in India because it is believed a third river's (Saraswati) current mingles with the first two underground, unseen. Elaborate bathing rituals are performed at dawn and dusk here. Here too takes place the holiest festival of Hinduism, the *Kumbha Mela* (Pitcher Congregation) — one of the four spots where the pitcher containing *amrita*, nectar, which bestows immortality was put down by an exhausted carrier, Lord Vishnu, after the ocean's churning.

Through the length and breadth lie scattered other spots, only less lovely than the Jammu-Kashmir (political name) Vale. Dehra Dun, Mussourie, Shimla, Kathgodam, Mirik, Tezpur, Darjeeling are some of such, though they do not provide tourist house-boats for a pleasure-seeker as the Dal Lake in Kashmir does. On many a hill-side the green leaves of tea bushes ripple in the breeze and lovely women with apple-red cheeks and a child slung on the back work among them.

Enchanted by the scenic beauty and sublime stillness, a sannyasi wrote to a brother-in-faith, in July 1890, 'I am longing for a flight to the Himalayas'[4]. The Brahmaputra enchanted him.[5] Another like Atish and Dipankar — Buddhist monks who after learning and teaching in the then universities of Nalanda and Taxila crossed the mighty hump mostly on foot to carry their god's message of love to Tibet.

*****

It has taken me nearly 5,500 words to capture inadequately, uncouthly, an account of the myriad fascinating aspects (as I look at this) of the magic mountain that is the Himalayas. I wish I could delve into it more; so little time is left to one who is in his mid-seventies and soon must cross the great barrier of another kind. Then, what? *Che sara sara* (Italian: What will be, will be). 'Nobody can flee his destiny' here or hereafter.❐

4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, vols. 1 to 8, 1989; vol. 9, 1997), vol. 6, p. 243; letter no. XXXIV.
5. Ibid., vol. 5, pp. 165-6; letter no. CVIII.

Whenever there has been a great conquering race, bringing the nations of the world together, making roads and transit possible, immediately India arose and gave her quota of spiritual power to the sum total of the progress of the world.

—*Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 157

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Glimpses of Swamiji's Life in New York

SWAMI TATHAGATANANDA

Back in March 1995, the first part of this article—upto the founding of the Vedanta Society by Swamiji in 1894—by the same author appeared in Prabuddha Bharata. *This is a sequel to it and highlights the tremendous spiritual impact Swamiji exerted on the American mind during his three visits to New York.*

Swami Vivekananda never spared himself. While imparting a spiritual education of universal character 'to create a new order of humanity', he called forth people's inherent divinity and roused them to an awareness of their innate glory and goodness. The West was influenced by Swamiji's sublime and rational thoughts in its new search for life within. 'What is God?' and 'What is the universe?' — these questions will never be asked by people at large. But the average person can no longer be indifferent to the vital questions — 'What am I?', 'Who am I?' Here Swamiji's stirring gospel of the divinity of man, the dominant theme of his teaching, urged his students to open a new portal of life, a new vision of a life of blessedness. Swamiji gave the *living* bread of life to anguished souls in the West.

His New York classes were over on June 1, 1895. Although they were a financial failure and physically exhausting, he was very happy to have some good students who 'are more valuable than all the wealth of the world'. He left New York on June 4 and enjoyed a blessed twelve days at Camp Percy, which was 'lovely, quiet and very restful'. From there he went to Thousand Island Park where he stayed from June 18 to August 7.

From Thousand Island Park Swamiji came to New York on August 8th, stayed with Miss Mary A. Phillips at 19 West 38th Street and conducted classes. Miss Mary was 'a lady prominent in circles of women's charitable and intellectual work in the metropolis'. In Vedanta she found a 'foundational faith' and therefore became an active worker and admirer. She became the first Secretary of the New York Vedanta Society which, was founded in November of 1894.

The sculptress Malvina Hoffman was then a little girl, and probably met Swamiji during his stay there. Swamiji left New York for Paris on August 17th, 1895. It may be remembered that during the absence of Swamiji, 'weekly classes of the Vedanta Society had been held either by Swami Kripananda (Landsberg) or Swami Abhayananda (Marie Louise)', two of Swamiji's American devotees to whom Swamiji gave the vows of Sannyasa at Thousand Island Park.[1]

At the invitation of Mr. Sturdy and Miss Muller, Swamiji went to London from Paris. There he sowed the seeds of Vedanta and acquired the friendship of Miss Noble and Mr. and Mrs. Sevier.

Swamiji landed in New York on December 6th, 'clad in a red and flowing Hindu cloak'. It was a very chilly morning, with the temperature six degrees below the freezing point. He was received by Swami Kri-

1. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1985), in six volumes, vol. 3, p. 334, p. 144. [Hereafter, *New Discoveries.*]

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pananda, who accompanied him to his residence at 228 West 39th Street. This lodging house, with its two large parlour rooms, was his second home in New York and had been rented by Swamiji's friends a few days earlier. Kripananda stayed here from April 9 to July 10, 1895, and held classes here beginning in November, on behalf of the Vedanta Society. From Sister Devamata's account, it was 'one in a long monotonous row of dingy boarding houses' which to the Swami himself was 'very dirty and miserable'. Both rooms, with no private bath or kitchen, were very inconvenient. Swamiji and Kripananda had to share the community kitchen on the ground floor and the bathroom above was also shared by all. Cooking was generally done by Swamiji, and Kripananda had to wash many pots and pans, much to his irritation.

Swamiji started teaching classes on Mondays in the evening. From December 9th through 22nd he held classes twice daily on four days of the week and a question-and-answer class on Sundays.[2] Kripananda had to take a small room on the top floor of the house in order to accommodate the 'crowded preliminary classes'. The two parlour rooms were used for classes. Initial attendance varied from 70 to 120. But the quality of the students was quite impressive, as reported by the *New York Herald* on January 11, 1896: 'A well-dressed audience of distinguishing appearance'. Prominent members of the congregation included Miss Waldo, Mr. and Mrs. Leggett, the Goodyears, the Guernseys, Mr. Goodwin, Miss Mary Phillips, Miss Ruth Ellis, Dr. Wight, Emma Thursby and Antoinette Sterling, Mary Mapes Dodge, Kate Douglas Wiggin, Ella Wheeler Wilcox with her husband, and Nicholas Tesla. They were all students of Swamiji, and in all likelihood attended his classes. Emma Thursby and Antoinnette Sterling were famous in the world of music. Mary Mapes Dodge, Kate Douglas Wiggin and Ella Wheeler Wilcox were famous in the literary world. Tesla was the famous scientist.

Swamiji certainly had an influential following. Even many of the clergy attended his classes. He received an invitation from John P. Fox to speak before the Harvard Graduate Philosophical Club, where he lectured twice daily for four days in addition to his public lectures on Sunday afternoon.

Swamiji's friends felt the necessity for a qualified stenographer to take notes of Swamiji's lectures and classses. They placed a single advertisement in two local newspapers on December 13, 1895. Mr. Goodwin responded promptly and was immediately hired. After a while the Society decided to publish Swamiji's lectures. These were typed by Goodwin, edited by Miss Waldo and finally checked by Swamiji. 'The Ideal of Universal Religion', the first pamphlet published in January 1896 [*New Discoveries*, vol. 3, p. 392], marked the beginning of the books on Vedanta philosophy. Gradually, the four Yogas — Karma, Bhakti, Raja and Jnana — were published under the auspices of the Vedanta Society, [with Karma-Yoga and the 'Real and the Apparent Man' being presented to the public] on February 23, 1896.[3] The second edition of 'Karma-Yoga' was brought out by The Vedanta Society of New York in 1901. In 1902 'Jnana-Yoga' (Part I) was published by the Society. This was the first western edition of 'Jnana Yoga'.

From the very beginning, Goodwin worked day and night over the lectures, taking them down stenographically and then typewriting them all in the same day. Like Goodwin, Miss Waldo proved herself to be a real servant of God (Haridasi). A few days after classes had started, Swamiji said to Miss Waldo, 'The food here seems so unclean,

2. *New Discoveries*, vol. 3, p. 332.

3. *New Discoveries*, vol. 3, p. 527.

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would it be possible for you to cook for me?' She was delighted. Immediately, she approached the landlady and obtained permission to use the kitchen. '[She] moved about doing everything.... Her service was continuous and untiring. She cooked, edited, cleaned and took dictation, taught and managed, read proofs and saw visitors.... She lived at the far end of Brooklyn. The only means of transportation was a jogging horse-car and it required two hours to reach Swamiji's lodging at 39th Street.... The daily journey would have been an arduous one. Undaunted, every morning found her on her way at eight o'clock or earlier; and at nine or ten at night, she was on her way home again.... When there came a free day, the journey was reversed. It was Swamiji who took the jogging horse-car, travelled the two hours and cooked the meals. He found genuine rest and relaxation in the freedom and quiet of Miss Waldo's simple home. The kitchen was on the top floor of the house, in front of it the dining-room full of sunshine and potted plants. As the Swami invented new dishes or tried experiments with Western provisions, he ran back and forth from one room to the other like a child at play.'[4]

On February 13, shortly before the end of the season, Swamiji gave the vows of Sannyasa to Dr. Street, who is known to us as Swami Yogananda. On February 20, Swamiji gave the vows of Brahmacharya to Miss Waldo, Mr. Goodwin and Mr. Van Haagen.

Apart from conducting classes at the Society, Swamiji also gave many public lectures in Hardman Hall, Mott Memorial Hall, Unity Hall in Hartford, Connecticut, the Metaphysical Society in Brooklyn, the People's Church in New York, Madison Square Garden — with a seating capacity of fifteen hundred, and the Ethical Society of Brooklyn. Swamis Abhayananda and Kripananda were also holding classes to assist Swamiji in spreading the message of Vedanta. Swamiji, in his letter to Mr. Sturdy on December 16, 1895, wrote, 'The last month my lectures were in a small hall holding about 600. But 900 will come as a rule, 300 standing and about 300 going off, not finding room.'[5]

Out of these classes and lectures, several books on Vedanta were published, first in pamphlet form and later in book form. 'Raja-Yoga' was published in England in July 1896: Miss Waldo worked very hard to set the manuscript of Raja-Yoga in time for publication. Mr. Sturdy, another admirer of Swamiji in London, borrowed the manuscript and published it in London, with a good motive. Of course, this created lots of confusion and hard feelings among the members of The Vedanta Society of New York. The American edition was later published by adding the glossary and other matters.

There was a distinct lack of cooperation and understanding among the friends of Swamiji, who were spread out in three places: New York, Boston and London. 'The existing organization — the Vedanta Society of which Miss Mary Phillips was secretary, Mr. Walter Goodyear, treasurer, and Miss Waldo, untitled but ever present worker — was not, in fact, a particularly strong and cohesive group such as could support and promote the young Vedanta movement. There were no headquarters, no one to take full charge, and little cooperation.'[6]

Swamiji did not want to entangle himself in 'horrid money affairs'. He had 'no aptitude for organization'. The existing Society had

4. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 2nd Edition, 1964), Reminiscences by Sister Devamata, pp. 136–7.

5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 8, p. 364. [Hereafter, C.W.]

6. *New Discoveries*, vol. 4, p. 316.

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been 'nebulous and largely ineffectual'. It had sympathisers but not formal membership. Swamiji did not like the business mentality in a spiritual organization for 'in the long run it does harm and sets a bad example'.

In a previous season, before December 1895, Swamiji had delivered paid public lectures to support his classes in the Society. In December 1895, Swamiji took the initiative to set up an Executive Committee within the Vedanta Society which would take up the secular and business side of the Society. This newly created Committee gave Swamiji great relief as he wanted '"to step entirely out of the money question" — in both public lectures and private classes'. Later, it was considered expedient to create a new committee, the 'Publication Committee of The Vedanta Society,' which would take over all the publishing activities of the Executive Committee. The new Committee was headed by Mrs. Bull, who was, in Swamiji's words, 'the principal backer,' (together with Mr. Leggett). Hencefore, the Vedanta Society took on, officially or unofficially, the role of the publisher. On February 23, Swamiji's first book *Karma Yoga* was presented to the public. The pamphlet 'The Real and the Apparent Man', which came out on the same day, presented a photograph of Swamiji on its cover; the typefaces on the cover and title page were better chosen than—or, at least, different from—those of the earlier pamphlets, and their arrangement was more arresting. Both these publications had a line which indicated that these were published under the auspices of the Vedanta Society. As far as can be inferred, it was during the week *Karma Yoga* went to press that the Publication Committee was set up to handle it and to take into its care the publication of Swamiji's pamphlets and future books composed of his New York lectures and classes. As far as can be determined, Miss Waldo was officially placed in charge of the editorial work, Mr. Goodwin of the printing, and Mr. and Mrs. Goodyear of the distribution and accounting. (*New Discoveries*, vol. 3, pp. 327-8.)

In keeping with the age-old tradition of India where Sannyasins give freely for spiritual discourses, Swamiji wanted to follow the same principle for the Vedanta Movement in the West, to maintain the purity of its character. 'Thus Swamiji's decision to set a precedent of free public lectures had a twofold purpose: it would release his successors from the burden of earning money and it would compel the Western societies to stand financially on their own feet.'[7]

The financial condition of the Society, obviously, was not good. Friends of the Society, though not rich, spent money for its expenses. 'There is no doubt that Swamiji lived with utmost frugality, working constantly, giving the best of his life to his Mission in the West.' The Society, which was working behind the scenes, confining itself to the business aspect — renting the hall, printing the pamphlets and making of plans, etc., 'came into being only as Swamiji left New York — much as stars seem to come into being only as the sun leaves the sky.'[8] After remaining 'a loosely-woven organization' for some time, it emerged as an effective body, becoming a vehicle for the 'study and propagation of Vedantic literature'. Prior to Swamiji's departure from New York, he wrote to Mrs. Bull on Tuesday, April 14, 'confirming his appointment of Mrs. Bull as caretaker of his work'.[9] The mandate given by Swamiji: 'I leave everything to your care,' enabled Mrs. Bull to make correspondences with the friends of Swamiji in New York — Miss Phillips, Miss Waldo, Mr. Leggett, and Miss MacLeod — for making the Society more effective and stable. In one correspondence with Miss Waldo, Mrs. Bull wrote, 'I trust the time may come when the

7. *New Discoveries*, vol. 3, p. 387.
8. *New Discoveries*, vol. 3, p. 528.
9. *New Discoveries*, vol. 4, p. 134.

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good service and the personal devotion felt for the Swami Vivekananda may find a common unity of expression in steadfast loyalty to him and consideration each for the other.'[10]

During the last three months of 1896, Miss Waldo rendered commendable services for Swamiji's work in her own way which was, perhaps, more pleasing to Swamiji than the reorganization along the lines of Mrs. Bull. Swamiji wrote to Mrs. Bull on November 13, 'New York has settled down to work.'[11]

It may be remembered that Swamiji wrote a very beautiful letter to Miss Waldo on October 8, 1896, from Wimbledon. Swamiji urged Miss Waldo earnestly to commence taking classes (*C.W.*, vol. 6, p. 376), as 'he considers her his ablest and best-prepared student in this country.'[12]

Swami Saradananda came to the Vedanta Society in January 1897.

Swamiji, accompanied by Mr. Goodwin, reached Detroit on the 3rd of March. This was his third visit. He stayed there for two weeks and gave classes. From Detroit he came to Boston, where he gave four lectures before a very large audience of between four and five hundred people. On March 25th, Swamiji spoke before the Harvard Graduate Philosophical Club, and this is considered 'one of the most remarkable incidents of his whole American career'.

Swamiji returned to New York on April 11, after visiting Chicago and left New York for his second visit to England on April 15, 1896. From his last known residence at 6 West 43rd Street he wrote a short letter of farewell to his dear Hale sisters conveying his 'everlasting memory of love, gratitude and blessings'.

This is the end of his first visit to America where he spent less than two and a half years. About Swamiji's strenuous December days[13] we get this report from Kripananda — 'The Swami works very hard, ... lecturing twice a day, and then spending the rest of the time in hard study over the Sanskrit books, ... not allowing himself half an hour a day going outdoors. He eats very little — vegetable food.' Certainly anyone else would have made himself sick.... Swamiji wrote on this same day to his Madras disciple, 'Sometimes I have to deliver two or three lectures a day — and thus I make my way against all odds — hard work; any weaker man would die.' Nor, as he was to write to Mrs. Bull on February 6, 1896, had he 'slept even one night soundly in New York.'

'It is not possible to estimate the amount of energy Swamiji expended during this season, for one cannot judge his work by ordinary standards. Yet even by those standards, even in terms of physical and intellectual energy, his output was prodigious. At a conservative estimate, he held throughout this season (from December 9 through February 25) seventy classes (including those at Miss Corbin's) and delivered ten public lectures. And this in addition to interviews, initiations, extensive correspondence, the writing of articles, the translating of scriptures, the editing of lectures for publication, and the organizing of his work into some sort of shape that would contain and perpetuate his message. He had given of himself to the point of exhaustion during those three months — and there remained far more to do.'[14] 'He [Swamiji] came, a stranger, unheralded, but, by the force of his magnetic eloquence and the purity of his personal character, he commanded the attention and interest of thousands and attracted their

10. *New Discoveries*, vol. 4, p. 341.
11. *New Discoveries*, vol. 4, p. 341.
12. *New Discoveries*, vol. 4, p. 339.
13. *New Discoveries*, vol. 3, p. 375.
14. *New Discoveries*, vol. 3, p. 538.

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minds to the study of a subject almost entirely unknown to them.' Thus writes Mary A. Phillips, Secretary of the Vedanta Society, to 'Our Indian Brethren' [*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 211]. Through his books the liberal-minded thinking people will be inspired, no doubt.

Swamiji again came to America on August 28, 1899, and went straight to Ridgely Manor where he spent his longest vacation in America, one of ten weeks, from August 28 until November 7. It may be remembered that Swamiji visited that manor twice in 1895: one short visit in April 1895 and one during the Christmas season.

He came to the Vedanta Society, which acquired a new home at 146 East 55th Street, between Lexington and Third Avenues, on November 7 and stayed there less than two weeks. A reception was given to Swamiji on November 10th, which was attended by many students and former friends of the Swami. Though public, the reception was formal. Swamiji refrained from giving any public lectures but he was always found to attend the classes and meetings of the Society and he also gave short talks there and replied to the questions put to him. Here we give the reminiscences of Swami Atulananda who saw Swamiji at the reception for the first time:

> Let me record only one of my impressions of the evening. I do so because it came to me with such great force. Swamiji was so simple in his behaviour — so like one of the crowd — that he did not impress me too much when I first saw him. There was nothing about his ways that would mark him as the lion of New York society, as so often he had been. Simple in dress and behaviour, he was just like one of us. He did not put himself aside on a pedestal as is so often the case with lionized personages. He walked about the room, sat on the floor, laughed, joked, chatted — nothing formal. Of course, I had noticed his magnificent, brilliant eyes, his beautiful features and majestic bearing, for these were parts of him that no circumstances could hide. But when I saw him for a few minutes, standing on a platform surrounded by others, it flashed to my mind: 'What a giant, what strength, what manliness, what a personality! Everyone near him looks so insignificant in comparison.' It came to me almost as a shock and seemed to startle me. What was it that gave Swamiji this distinction? Was it his height? No, there were gentlemen there taller than he was. Was it his build? No, there were near him some very fine specimens of American manhood. It seemed to be more in the expression of the face than anything else. Was it his purity? What was it? I could not analyse it. I remembered what had been said of Lord Buddha — 'A lion amongst men.' I felt that Swamiji had unlimited power, that he could move heaven and earth if he willed it. This was my strongest and lasting impression of him.[15]

Another sweet memory of Swami Atulananda recalls the time when he went to the Society, holding a large portrait of Jesus in his hand:

> The Swami asked me what I had there. I told him that it was a picture of Christ talking to the rich young man. 'Oh, let me see it,' he said eagerly. I handed him the picture. And never shall I forget the tenderness in his look when he held the picture and looked at it. At last he returned it to me, with the simple words: 'How great was Jesus!' And I could not help thinking that there was something in common between these two souls.[16]

Swamiji came to New York from Chi-

15. Swami Atulananda, *With the Swamis in America and India* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1988), pp. 59–60.
16. *New Discoveries*, vol. 5, p. 159.

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cago on June 7, 1900. During a reception on June 10th, he said joyfully, 'I have knocked at the door of New York three times. It never opened. Now I am very happy to see that the Society has a house of its own.' Swamiji expressed his satisfaction at being able to live in the Vedanta Society's own house at 102 East 58th Street, just off Park Avenue. Actually, it was a rented house in a good neighbourhood. There was only one bed in the Vedanta Society and that was given to Swamiji. Swamis Turiyananda and Abhedananda slept on the floor. Nivedita was also staying in New York at that time and attended most of Swamiji's classes. She also spoke at the Society. In June, Swamiji gave three Sunday lectures and four classes on the *Gita* on Saturdays. His last class at the Society was on July 1, 1900. On July 3rd, Swamiji and Swami Turiyananda left New York, Swamiji for Detroit, and the latter for California, for his new assignment. Swamiji returned to New York on July 10th. From that time till July 26th — the day he sailed for Paris — Swamiji lived at the Vedanta Society. Mrs. Crane, the caretaker of things, Ellen Waldo and Sister Christine were also with Swamiji at the Vedanta Society.

We would like to inform our readers of some activities of Swamiji. In June, Swami Vivekananda spoke at the Vedanta Society in his usual way, which drew his audience — though small in number — like a powerful magnet.

Swamiji definitely was aware of the impact of his lectures and classes, which went into 'depths theretofore unguessed'. Some twenty years later, Swami Turiyananda, who was present at that time at the Society, said to a group of devotees at Benares: 'Swamiji used to tell us, "Do you think I only lecture? I know I give them something solid, and they know they receive something solid." In New York Swamiji was lecturing to a class,' Swami Turiyananda continued. 'Oh, the tremendous effect of it! K. [Swami Abhedananda] said that while listening to the lecture, he felt as if some force was drawing the Kundalini up, as at the time of meditation. After the lecture was finished (it took an hour), K. announced that he would hold a question class. Most of the audience had gone after Swamiji's lecture. Swamiji rebuked — saying, "A question class after this! Do you want to spoil the effect of my lecture?" Just see! Oh, what a Power Sri Ramakrishna left for the world in Swamiji! Hasn't he changed the very thought-current of the world?'[17]

One Sunday morning in June 1900, Mrs. Lillian Montgomery was in Swamiji's audience. She was highly impressed and consequently attended every lecture and class that Swamiji gave during that brief period — a period of her life that changed her world. Swamiji's vast and penetrating capacity of power and meditation were to leave such an indelible impression that she was able to write vividly of Swamiji when, more than fifty years later in 1954, that request was made of her by Swami Pavitrananda, who was then the head of the New York Vedanta Society. She again spoke thrillingly of Swamiji in 1955 to the Society's members, in a talk that was taped.

These intimate, unpublicized talks of Swamiji in that sweltering June heat were attended mostly by close devotees. About thirty people came to the Saturday morning class and at the Sunday morning lectures, the attendance almost always exceeded one hundred. From Swami Abhedananda's diary we have a glimpse of a few simple activities of Swamiji that June: on a rainy June 14th afternoon, Swamiji and Swami Turiyananda and Dr. Kate Stanton visited Coney Island; on June 19th, Swamiji and Swami Abhedananda rode the Third Avenue El to the Bronx Zoo.

Replying to the remark that it was pain-

17. *New Discoveries*, vol. 6, pp. 276–7.

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ful that more were not taking advantage of Swamiji's sublime teachings, Swamiji said to Henry Van Haagen, 'I could have thousands more at my lectures if I wanted them. It is the sincere student who will help to make this work a success and not merely the large audiences. If I succeed in my whole life to help one man to reach freedom, I shall feel that my labours have not been in vain, but quite successful.'[18]

One July morning at breakfast table, Swamiji designed the emblem which was to become the seal of the Ramakrishna Order. We quote from Sister Devamata's memoirs indicating the circumstances under which it was designed.

> The design which has become the symbol of the Ramakrishna Mission everywhere came into being in the same casual way as did the 'Song of the Sannyasin'. It took shape in 1900 during Swami Vivekananda's later visit to America. At that time, The Vedanta Society of New York was definitely established and occupied a modest house in 58th Street. Mrs. Crane, the housekeeper, told me that the Swami was sitting at the breakfast table one morning when the printer arrived. He said he was making a circular for the Society and wished to have an emblem to go on it, could the Swami suggest something? Swamiji took the envelope from a letter he had just received, tore it open and on the clean inner surface drew the waves, the swan, the lotus, and the sun circled by a serpent — the four Yogas wrapped about by eternity, it seemed. He threw the bit of paper with the design on it across the table and said, 'Draw it to scale.' Henry Van Haagen, the printer, was an able draughtsman as well as printer. He converted the rough sketch into a finished drawing.[19]

It may be remembered that he had taken the vows of Brahmacharya from Swamiji earlier.

We like to quote Swamiji, who interpreted the design to Miss MacLeod:

> 'The Sun = Knowledge,' Swamiji explained to Miss MacLeod, shortly after creating the design. 'The stormy water = Work. The lotus = Love. The serpent = Yoga. The swan = the Self. The Motto = May the Swan (the Supreme Self) send us that. It is the mind-lake.'[20]

The significance of the design explained by Swamiji at Belur Math in 1901 to Ranada P. Dasgupta, an artist, is given below:

> The wavy waters in the picture are symbolic of Karma; the lotus, of Bhakti; and the rising-sun, of Jnana. The encircling serpent is indicative of Yoga and the awakened Kundalini Shakti, while the sun in the picture stands for the Paramatman (Supreme Self). Therefore the idea of the picture is that by the union of Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, and Yoga, the vision of the Paramatman is obtained.[21]

Conclusion

In his two trips, Swamiji spent nearly thirty-nine months in America. During this period, he sowed the seeds of his immortal message in a much deeper sense which worked silently in creating a new current of thought in the mind of the nation. Swamiji opened up a new horizon of expanding life and religious consciousness, and talked about enlarging and deepening our world vision. 'The "spiritual jolt" which Swami Vivekananda gave to the West early in this century,' to quote M.L. Burke, 'is now proving its impact.' ☐

18. *New Discoveries*, vol. 6, pp. 307–08.
19. *New Discoveries*, vol. 6, p. 307.
20. *New Discoveries*, vol. 6, p. 308.
21. *C.W.*, vol. 7, p. 204.

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Pilgrimage to Mount Kailas and Manasarovar

SWAMI ATMESHANANDA

In the early days of the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati, monks going on a pilgrimage to Kedar, Badri, Amarnath, Kailas or Manasarovar used to pass through Mayavati and spend a few days at the Ashrama's rest-house. The tradition continues even to this day. However, alternative routes have come to the fore, offering easier and quicker modes of travel. In this article, Swami Atmeshananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order now working in its branch in Singapore, gives a captivating account of his recent pilgrimage to Mount Kailas and Manasarovar. Mixed with devotion in profusion and punctuated with mythical legends, this narrative, picturing vividly the natural setting, does kindle in the mind of the reader a desire to visit what the author calls paradise on earth.

In India we find the oldest continually operative pilgrimage tradition in the entire world. Going on a pilgrimage is so deeply embedded in the cultural psyche of Indians, and the number of pilgrimage sites so numerous, that the entire subcontinent may actually be regarded as one grand and continuous sacred space. Our earliest information on the concept of sacred space comes from the *Rig Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. While pilgrimage is not specifically discussed in these texts, mountain valleys and the confluence of rivers are spoken of with reverence, and the merit of travel to such places with a devout heart is mentioned. Following the Vedic period, the practice of pilgrimage seems to have become quite common, as is evident from sections of the great epic, the *Mahabharata* (500BC), which mentions more than 300 sacred sites spanning the entire continent.

Hindus call the sacred places to which they travel, *tirthas*, and the going on a pilgrimage, *tirtha-yatra*. The Vedic word *tirtha* means a river, a ford, steps leading to a river, or a place of pilgrimage. In Vedic times, the word may have concerned only those sacred places associated with water, but by the time of the *Mahabharata*, *tirtha* had come to denote any holy place, be it a lake, a mountain, a forest, or a cave. *Tirthas* are more than physical locations, however. Devout Hindus believe them to be spiritual fords, the meeting place of heaven and earth, the locations where one crosses over the river of *samsara* (the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth) to reach the distant shore of liberation. Writing in *Banaras: City of Light*, Diana Eck speaks of *tirthas* as being primarily associated with the great acts and appearances of the gods and heroes of Indian myth and legend. As a threshold between heaven and earth, a *tirtha* is not only a place for the upward crossings of people's prayers and rites, it is also a place for the downward crossings of gods. These divine descents are the well-known *avataras* (Incarnations) of the Hindu tradition. Indeed, the words *tirtha* and *avatara* come from related verbal roots. One might say that the *avataras* descend, opening the doors of the *tirthas* so that men and women may ascend via their rites and prayers.

The primary intention of a pilgrim's visit to a pilgrimage site is to receive the *darshan* of the deity in the temple's inner sanctum or open-air shrine. The word *darshan*, difficult to translate into English, generally means the pilgrim's having a sight and/or experience of the deity. Hindus believe that the deity is actually manifest in the image, statue or icon in the temple. To receive the *darshan* of the deity is to have a spiritual communion with it. The image of the deity may either be an

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iconic, or representational, image that bears some resemblance to its mythic subject, or an iconic form that merely symbolizes the deity.

A pilgrimage to the holy Mount Kailas is considered by a Hindu to be the ultimate of all pilgrimages. There are mountains and mountains, but Mount Kailas is a mountain with a distinction: the majestic character and the aura surrounding it differentiates it from other mountains. It has been a pilgrimage site for more than 2500 years. During this time, the Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and the followers of the Bonpo (or Bon) faith have each sanctified this now remote and desolate corner of the Tibetan plateau within their own traditions, while sharing the belief in the spiritual value of pilgrimage to this unique region. Political events prevented access for Indian pilgrims during the 1962–1981 period. Under a pact with the Chinese government, Indian pilgrims are allowed to go in batches now. From 1993, pilgrims are also allowed to go from Nepal. The route from the Indian side is long and necessitates travelling by foot for a number of days. Whereas, from the Nepal side, time-strapped pilgrims can make the pilgrimage by motor vehicles.

In late February of 1998, myself and a medical practitioner from Singapore decided to undertake the pilgrimage. While the latter had been thinking about the pilgrimage for long, my inspiration was sudden — an irresistible urge came over me to undertake the pilgrimage. Two of my brother monks from Belur Math, our Headquarters, also consented to join. Contacts were made at Kathmandu and we procured the necessary information. Since special visa had to be procured from Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, we were required to send copies of our passports three weeks prior to the date of our arrival in Kathmandu, which we did. The Dharma Yatra Mahasangh, Nepal, a religious body, had decided to organize the pilgrimage for interested persons. Swami Chinmayanandaji, who had been sent to Kathmandu to start a centre there, was very helpful in making all necessary arrangements.

On 31 May, we reached Kathmandu. Our tour organizers had arranged for a half-day pilgrimage to the various religious sites in Kathmandu. We visited the famous temple of Lord Pasupatinath and prayed for the successful and fruitful pilgrimage to Kailas. Pasupatinath is said to be one of the famous Jyotirlingas or 'illuminative' lingams. Situated five kilometres east of Kathmandu on the banks of the sacred Bagmati river, the temple of Lord Shiva Pasupatinath (*Pasu* in Sanskrit means animal; it also means the senses. The Lord over the senses, which have animal propensities, is Shiva.) with its two-tiered golden roof and silver doors, is famous for its superb architecture. It is a centre of annual pilgrimage on the day of Maha Shivaratri. The four-faced Shiva-lingam attracts devotees from all parts of the world. Entrance to the main temple is permitted to Hindus only, yet visitors can clearly see the temple and some of the activities performed on the temple premises from the eastern bank of the Bagmati river. We also prayed at the Guhyeswari temple, one of the Shakti-peethas for Sati, a form of the Divine Mother. Devout prayers were offered at Boudhnath, a stupa constructed by the Buddhists, and the famous Swayambhunath stupa. Historical records found on a stone inscription give evidence that the latter stupa was already an important Buddhist pilgrimage destination by the 5th century AD. A collection of legends about the site, the 15th century Swayambhu Purana, tells of a miraculous lotus planted by a past Buddha, which blossomed from the lake that once covered Kathmandu valley. The lotus mysteriously radiated a brilliant light, and the name of the place came to be Swayambhu, meaning 'Self-Created' or 'Self-Existent'. Saints, sages and divinities travelled to the lake to venerate this miraculous light for its power in granting enlightenment. During this time, the Bodhisatva Manjushri was meditating at the sacred mountain of Wo Tai Shan in China when he had a vision of the dazzling Swayambhu

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light. Manjushri flew across the mountains of China and Tibet upon his blue lion to worship the lotus. Deeply impressed by the power of the radiant light, Manjushri felt that if the water were drained out of the lake, Swayambhu would become more easily accessible to human pilgrims. With a great sword Manjushri cut a gorge in the mountains surrounding the lake. The water draining away, left the valley of present-day Kathmandu. The lotus then transformed into a hill and the light became the Swayambhunath Stupa.

A visit to Dakshina Kali, a famous place of pilgrimage to the locals a few kilometres away from Kathmandu, was indeed rewarding. The local people consider the emblem of Kali there as self-created and pray to this 'awakened' deity with sacrificial offerings.

On 1 June evening, we were briefed about our pilgrimage to Kailas and Manasarovar (actually Manasa-sarovar). The tour organizers did not hesitate to tell us that though the pilgrimage will be spiritually elevating, we should be prepared to face physical hardships since the terrain is inhospitable and sometimes the vagary of the elements could dampen our spirits. The tour organizers assured us that, as a precautionary measure for emergencies, they would be sending a GAMOW bag—which is a portable hyperbaric chamber that looks like an inflatable extra-large sleeping bag—with us. The effective altitude inside the inflated GAMOW bag is about 1524 metres lower than the altitude one is at; it is effective in relieving altitude sickness. However, we, a group of fourteen which consisted of three monks and eleven lay devotees, laid our hopes on Lord Shiva's grace and decided to undertake the pilgrimage. The oldest in our group was 74 years old, followed by his wife, 72 years. On 2 June, a farewell meeting was held at the hotel where we stayed. Since ours was the first batch organized by the said Yatra Mahasangh, the Rajguru (religious instructor to the King of Nepal), Dr. Swami Prapannacharya (a renowned monk of Nepal), the Secretary to the Ministry of Tourism, Nepal, and other dignitaries had been invited to convey their good wishes for a safe and successful journey.

We left Kathmandu on 3 June morning for Kodari, the town bordering Nepal and Tibet. The journey through Nepal countryside amidst mountains was charming and we reached Kodari after travelling the distance of 122 kms. in four hours. We crossed the Friendship Bridge and entered Chinese territory. Another 8 kms. took us to the first town on the Chinese side of the border known as Zhangmu, where we went through the China Customs and Immigration. Tibetan time is 2 hours and 30 minutes ahead of that of India. At Zhangmu, our guide from Lhasa, with four Land Cruisers and a truck, was waiting for us. The vehicles were quite comfortable and we took our seats — four in each vehicle. Soon we were on our way to our destination for the day, Nyalam (Valley of Happiness). The town of Nyalam, situated 35 kms. from Zhangmu, is located at an altitude of 3800 metres above sea-level. The climb to this higher altitude was sudden and we felt the lack of oxygen as well as the chilly weather bothersome. Reaching Nyalam, we stayed at a reasonably comfortable guest house. Moreover, we were given a day at Nyalam for acclimatization. Six *sherpas* from Kathmandu, who were accompanying us, did all the cooking, pitching of tents, supplying drinking water, and carrying our luggage and other chores. Hardworking and patient, these *sherpas* also proved to be kind and very helpful to pilgrims.

The Nyalam valley is a beautiful place and our love towards the mountains blossomed here. We were interested in exploring the small town but desisted from doing so because we noticed the ever-watchful eyes of the officials from the Chinese Border Army. From books about the region we had learnt about the cave where Saint Milarepa had lived for some time. It was 7 kms. from Nyalam and we left for the place. Surrounding the cave, a monastery had been built, and we

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spent a few silent moments inside the cave, meditating. The place was surcharged with spiritual vibrations which could be tangibly felt. Jetsun Milarepa is Tibet's best-known yogi-sage as well as her most beloved bard. His 'The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa' extemporaneously sung nine hundred years ago to disciples and followers in the snowy Himalayan wilderness, has been translated into many languages. Milarepa's skin displayed a greenish hue, because he subsisted for many years on wild nettle soup.

Milarepa is famous for having attained perfect awakened Buddhahood in a single lifetime through decades of solitary meditations in mountain caves, dressed only in white cotton robes. His example as a spiritual practitioner has been the inspiration for countless generations of lamas, from the 11th century until today.

Milarepa's *guru* was Marpa the Translator, who spent seventeen years studying and meditating in India and brought the Mahamudra (Great Symbol) teachings to Tibet. Before Buddhism was introduced into Tibet, the extant religion in the region was known as Bon or Bonpo, a religion which believed in the acquisition of miraculous powers. Milarepa studied and mastered the disciplines of the said religion, and acquired extraordinary powers. He then used those powers to defeat the advocates of the religion and won them over to Buddhism.

On the third day of our pilgrimage we left for Saga, situated 230 kms. from Nyalam. For the first 100 kms. we travelled along paved roads which lead to Lhasa. But after the 100 kms., our vehicle had to pass through difficult terrain. We had to negotiate steep climbs, rivulets and sand dunes on the way. However, the sight of the grand mountain ranges of Shishạ Pangma, Ganesh Parvat, Jugal Himal and Peiku Lake on the way removed the monotony of the journey. The sight of the Peiku Lake, located at an altitude of 4600 metres was indeed rewarding. Kidney shaped, the turquoise coloured lake is also referred to as the Rudra Lake. A few kilometres away from this, we came across the Vishnu Lake, the waters of which were bluish in colour. After about 10 hours of driving, we saw the town called Saga at a distance. In order to reach there, we had to cross the Tsangpo river (Brahmaputra) by ferry. Here they still use the manual method of dragging the ferry by pulleys located on either bank of the river. It was a slow process but soon we, along with our vehicles, reached the other shore and camped a little away from Saga town. The place, located at an altitude of 4840 metres, was windy and our *sherpas* struggled with our tents to pitch them firmly. Cooking was equally difficult due to the strong winds. Some elderly pilgrims with us preferred to stay within the vehicles and rest there for the night than sleep in the tents. The next morning, we petitioned to our guide to accommodate us in guest houses on the way, to which he agreed. Though the towns and villages in Western Tibet are far apart and few, there are, in many places, mud-built guest houses where pilgrims can stay comfortably indoors for one or two nights.

Day four took us on to our next destination, Prayang, 160 kms. from Saga. After a whole day's journey, we reached Prayang (also called Paryang) late in the evening. The sun sets quite late in Tibet. During summer, it sets at about 9 p.m. Prayang is situated at an altitude of 4540 metres and is slightly lower than Saga. We checked into our guest house rooms and soon fell asleep due to the tiresome journey.

On the fifth day of our pilgrimage, we started for Darchen — also called Tarchen—, 290 kms. away. This was the most tiring leg of the journey. It took about 12 hours for us to reach a village near Darchen. It was a cloudy full moon day, yet we could see the Mount Kailas peak from a distance of 40 kms. Instantly our Tibetan driver got down and prostrated on the ground. The sight of the beautiful mountain instantaneously removed all the exhaustion from our minds and we shouted,

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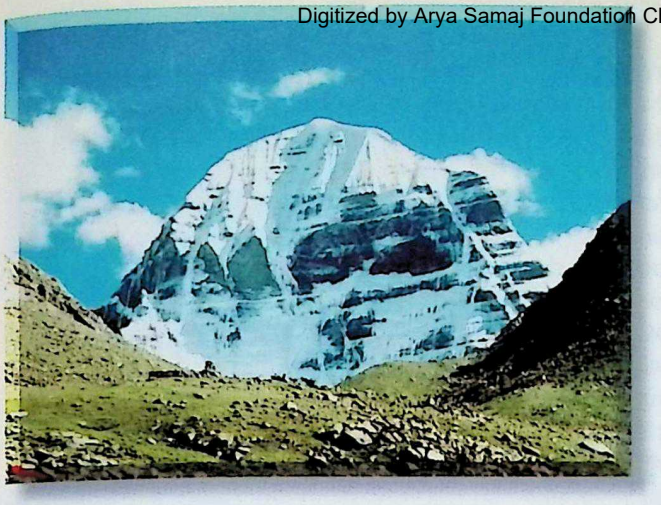

Lord Shiva's abode, Mount Kailash

Zaidi Camp Mansarovar, view at noon

The closeup of the lake

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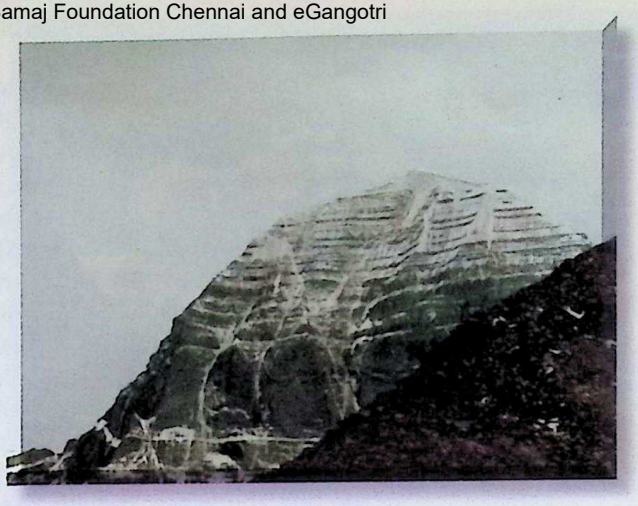
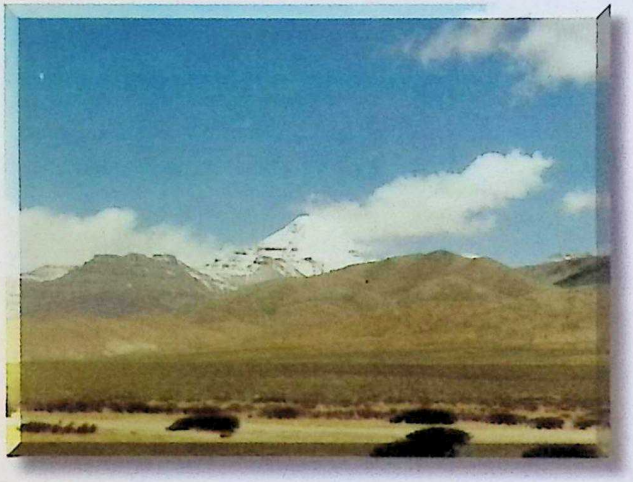
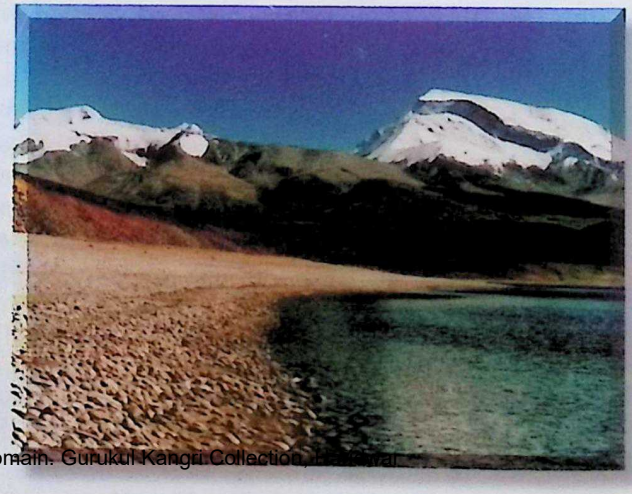


Kailash from Dirapuk



Mount Kailash viewed from a distance



Rakshas Tal, 50 ft. below Mansarovar

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'Jai Kailasapati Shivji ki Jai!'. Since it was quite dark, we did not proceed to Darchen but stayed in the said village.

Now that we were near our long-awaited place of adoration, we could not wait longer to reach the foot of Mount Kailas. The next morning we left for Darchen, which is the base camp for the holy Mount Kailas. Located at an altitude of 4575 metres, the camp has grown into a small town having some permanent buildings for use as guest houses. Pilgrims and tourists can replenish their food and other necessary items at some shops located there. From the Darchen valley we had a grand view of the mountain ranges of Kailas in the north, Gurla Mandhata in the south, and Selachakung in the west. Amidst all these mountains the Darchen valley appears like a magic land. On our reaching there, we took our first bath after leaving Nyalam in the icy waters of a rivulet flowing from the foot of Mount Kailas. Although we felt refreshed, a little later we realized our mistake to have dared to bathe in the icy waters because we experienced severe shortage of oxygen in our lungs. One of the devotees in our party had an instant solution for this. Though we were provided with oxygen canisters for emergencies, it was not pleasant to use it. The said devotee took out some camphor and asked us to keep it in our handkerchiefs. Whenever we felt shortage of breath, we sniffed the camphor and immediately felt relieved. This proved to be very helpful to us throughout our pilgrimage.

Mount Kailas is supposed to be the holiest of all symbols of Lord Shiva. Mention about this holy place can be found abundantly in many of our Puranas and the two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Recent pictures taken from satellites show that the great river Saraswati, now not visible, flowed in this region indicating the presence of a great Vedic civilization. Known as the Jewel of Snow, Mount Meru, Gang Rinpoche and Tisa to the followers of Jain, Hindu, Buddhist and Bonpo faiths, Kailas is termed as the axis-mundi (centre of the earth) in traditional Buddhist cosmology. Standing monolithically isolated at the centre of the Trans-Himalayan range, Kailas has attracted hearty, devout pilgrims from across Asia for countless centuries. To a Hindu, it is the abode of Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati; to the Buddhist, it is the seat of Chakrasamvara (Demchog in Tibetan); to the Jains, it is the place sanctified by a Tirthankara. Our Puranas are full of stories glorifying Kailas. One of the popular stories tells us about the Pandava brothers trying to find Shiva in the Himalayas. Lord Shiva disguised Himself as an animal in order to tease the Pandavas. Determined to find out the Lord, Bhima, the largest among the Pandava brothers, stood, placing his feet on two mountains in the Himalayas assuming a huge figure. The rest of the Pandavas started driving all the animals in the forest towards the spread out legs of Bhima. They knew that whereas all animals would not hesitate to pass beneath the legs of a human being, Lord Shiva would not do so. At last, when all the animals had passed through, a huge bull came and, seeing the spread out legs of Bhima, entered the earth. The head of the bull rose at Kailas and its hump remained at Kedar in the Himalayas. When we closely observed the Holy mountains, we did see the shape of a bull's nostrils and ears manifest on its crown.

Buddhists tell the story about the contest between Milarepa and the Bonpo priest over the legitimate ownership of pilgrimage rights to Mount Kailas. The contestants agreed that the one who first reached the summit of the mountain in the morning would be recognized as the legitimate lord of Kailas. At dawn on the morning of the contest, the Bonpo priest (Naro Bon-chung) started his journey to the summit riding on his ritual drum and beating it all the while. Milarepa waited until sunrise and rode in a flash on the rays of the sun to the summit, beating the Bonpo there. When Milarepa looked down and the surprised Bonpo looked up and saw him, so

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disconcerted and shocked was he that he dropped his drum and it broke in two and fell. The marks made from the falling pieces of the drum can still be seen on the mountain, shaped like steps.

While for Tibetan pilgrims, the ritual circumambulation called 'Kora' of Mount Kailas is the central activity of their pilgrimage, for Hindus, Kailas is the home of Shiva and, as such, to take *darshan* of the mountains was apparently enough for most pilgrims, who carried out religious rites at Manasarovar. Kailas is a Swayambhu-lingam ('Self-Manifested').

Our guide informed us that weather conditions were unfavourable to undertake the *parikrama* (circumambulation), since it had snowed heavily on the top of the *parikrama* route. Due to lack of oxygen and non-availability of yaks (the animal which transports luggage and people during the circumambulation), some of our fellow pilgrims thought it wise to think of the Lord and worship Him at the base camp itself. However, two of us, Swami Anantanandaji and myself, ventured to undertake the difficult *parikrama* and complete it. From Darchen the *parikrama* route is 54 kms. long. But our guide offered to take us 5 kms. up and 5 kms. down the *parikrama* route by motor vehicle. Thus on the seventh day of our pilgrimage, we left Darchen by our vehicle accompanied by other pilgrims. We reached a place called Tarboche where an annual Buddhist festival called 'Saga Dawa' was being held. During May–June when the festival is held, the Tibetans raise a flagpole and tie prayer flags in honour of the birth, enlightenment and Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha. At this place, we had a clear and enlarged view of Mount Kailas. Different patterns appearing on the top of the snow-clad peak resemble the three eyes (*Trinetra*) of Shiva, two nostrils and a series of step-like structures at the back. Pilgrims worship Shiva here and start on their journey. During the festival, a fair is held where Tibetans sell their colourful wares. We witnessed the ceremony of bringing down the flagpole and took leave of our co-pilgrims. Accompanied by two *sherpas* and four yaks which carried our tents and rations, we left on foot for our day's destination, Diraphuk Gompa (Gompa means monastery). The weather was favourable and the afternoon sun was quite bright. It was about half past one in the afternoon that we started our journey on foot. Keeping the Nyanri mountain to our left with the river Lha Chu (River of Gods) flowing between us, we sighted the Chukku Gompa at the base of the mountain. Time did not permit us to cross the river and go there but we were told that a marble statue supposedly resembling Guru Nanak was there. Tibetans call it Ghikky Rinpoche. Proceeding further, we saw towards the west of Kailas, a black peak. The peak is known as Ravana Peak (Gombophang). The Padmasambhava, Vajrapani and Hanuman Parvat were the other peaks we saw on our way. After trekking for about four and half hours, we reached the opposite side of Diraphuk Gompa. But before reaching there we had a grand view of the north-eastern portion of the Holy Mount Kailas, looking like an inverted silver bowl. The *darshan* of Kailas at this point immediately soothed our weary body and mind. Flanked by the peaks of Vajrapani to the left, Avalokiteswara Manjukosha, Shivari and Norsung to the right, the whole view is mesmerizing. A temptation to go further and touch the base of the Holy Mountain did cross my mind; but I desisted from it since I was told that it was dangerous to venture further, due to the slippery terrain which only experienced Tibetan lamas negotiate. Tibetans also believe that one of the four doors to the Cave which is located inside the Holy Mountain is located at this place, and a devotee fit to receive Nirvana can alone enter this sacred Cave and merge himself there. However, we enjoyed the beautiful view to our heart's content and proceeded towards Diraphuk Gompa situated on the other side of the river. To reach the place, we had to negotiate a glacier caused by the river. Walk-

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ing on ice and crossing another rivulet by a wooden bridge, we reached Diraphuk Gompa. Located at an altitude of 4909 metres, the Gompa maintains a guest house for providing shelter to the pilgrims. Though reluctant at first, the caretaker, a novice at the monastery, was won over by our identification as 'Hindu Lamas' and provided two rooms for the two of us and the *sherpas*. It was decided that since the yaks would not be able to walk through snow the next day, we would take one of the *sherpas* and proceed to complete the *parikrama*. The yaks and a *sherpa* would return to Darchen and inform our guide about our resolve. It was a cold night and we soon fell asleep.

On day eight, we woke up early in the morning and in darkness began our trek towards the highest point of our *parikrama*, viz., Drolma La ('La' means a mountain pass). Crossing the La Chu river, we began the long, steady, and very arduous climb. The climb was steep and we had to stop once after every ten steps for breath. Climbing, we spotted the Shiva Sthal, where the first rays of the morning sun fell. Tibetans call this place the Vajrayogini cemetery. Here the pilgrims offer their old belongings — some drop their old clothes, shoes and other articles, some even offer some of their hair and blood to Lord Yama, the god of Death. It is believed that if one can negotiate this place where Lord Yama (Dirge Jigies in Tibetan) purifies the pilgrim by his judgement, the climb to the peak of Drolma La would be successful. Though we felt sad at the garbage mound formed due to the offering of old articles, we nevertheless followed the custom by giving up some of our used clothes. At this point we noticed that the air became thinner and we had to watch every step of ours. The path was covered by snow and we followed the agile Tibetans who appeared to be running over the path. Generally, Tibetans perform the *parikrama* within a day whereas it takes people from the plains three days. Earlier we had seen some Tibetans performing what is called in Sanskrit '*Danda Pradakshina*' — circumambulation while prostrating on the ground throughout the *parikrama* route. We were told that this would take them nearly a month to finish one *parikrama*. We could not but admire and hold in awe the devout Tibetans for this!

Armed with a staff for support, we warily climbed up the mountain negotiating knee-deep snow and reached Drolma La. This being the highest point during the *parikrama*, we are required to perform our worship to Mount Kailas here itself. On a clear day one can have the vision of the North Face of Mount Kailas from here but such clear days are rare. We could have only a partial vision of Mount Kailas. Incidentally, I have to mention that none attempts climbing up the Holy Mountain: It is held in such great esteem that nobody dares place his feet upon the Mountain. Furthermore, the Holy Mountain is shielded on all its sides by different mountains. Drolma La is considered to be the place where one transcends from a sinful past life to a virtuous spiritual life by the grace of the Divine Mother. It is also known as Parvati Sthal. The Drolma rock is decorated with prayer flags, flowers, smeared with butter with currency notes stuck on them as offerings, and other objects. Tibetans pray here for their ancestors, friends and themselves. We had taken Vilva leaves which we offered there along with sandal paste, prayer flags, dry fruits, and sweets. Incense was burnt and we prayed here for the welfare of all humankind. It was surely an elevating experience to be at this place. But we could not stay here for long: located at an altitude of 5670 metres above sea level, strong winds start blowing here after midday. We were urged by a Tibetan lama to hurry up and start climbing down which we did. It had started drizzling and the path was narrow. Many a time we slipped but were helped to our feet by the kind Tibetan pilgrims. While ascending, we saw the frozen pond located 400 feet (122 metres) below called 'Gauri Kund'. Tibetans call it 'Thujimb'. The pond, having a radius of about 150

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feet (46 metres), is said to be always frozen. Devotees believe that it is the pond specially reserved for Mother Parvati to bathe.

Coming down, we collected some water from a small outlet supposed to be proceeding from Gauri Kund. Our *sherpa* urged us to speed up our pace of walking since he foresaw a snow storm blowing towards us. Walking along the Lham Chu river, we got caught in a snow storm for nearly two hours. But since no shelter was in sight, we proceeded, mustering all our strength. After walking for nearly five hours, we came to Zutrulpuk Gompa. This monastery, attributed to the Sage Milarepa, is where he displayed his magical prowess in a contest with the Bonpo priest Naro Bonchung. Generally pilgrims rest here for the day. But since we did not have food and sleeping bags with us, we decided to proceed to Darchen, little realizing that the distance was quite formidable.

From Zutrulpuk Gompa we walked for another five hours negotiating many peaks on our way. At last we reached at about 9.30 p.m. a check-post put up by the Chinese government The Chinese officials stopped us there and asked us to show our permit for performing the circumambulation! We were nonplussed since we had no money with us and were not aware even of the existence of such a permit. However, the officials asked us to wait in their tent and we sent our *sherpa* to Darchen to bring our guide and pay the fees. Within half an hour the *sherpa*, along with our guide and Land Cruiser, reached the check-post. The Chinese officials were surprised to hear that we had completed the *parikrama* within a day and a half instead of the normal three days.

At the base camp we were received with much rejoicing since they were all worried about our safety. Though physically tired, the joy of performing the *parikrama* raised our hopes and gave us a sense of fulfilment!

On the ninth day of our pilgrimage, we left Darchen for Manasarovar. After travelling for about two hours, we reached the base of Chiu Gompa. The Gompa, located on the top of a hillock, presented a wonderful sight. We were told that there were meditation cabins up there. Legend has it that the great saint Padmasambhava of Buddhism spent the last seven years of his life on this earth here. Surely the view of the whole landscape of Kailas and Manasarovar would be clearly visible from there. Nearby flows a rivulet which the locals call 'Ganga Chu'. Does the Holy Ganga river flow from this place? None could answer though the general belief is that the origin of the holy river is from the Kailas-Manasarovar region. Our guide did not stop at the said Chiu Gompa for long but proceeded to a relatively isolated spot on the banks of the lake and we checked into a guest house. The Manasarovar Lake, located at an altitude of 4530 metres, is the highest lake in the world. The circumference of the lake is 105 kms. Some pilgrims make a *parikrama* of this lake also, which takes them five to six days. Due to paucity of time we did not attempt this. The Lake Manasarovar (as we said earlier, it is actually Manasa-sarovar) is said to be the seat of the origin of four major rivers: Shatadru to the west, Sindhu to the north, Brahmaputra to the east, and Karnali to the south. The Tibetan names, respectively, are Langchen Khambab (Elephant Face), Singi Khambab (Lion Face), Tamchok Khambab (Horse Face), and Mapchu Khambab (Peacock Face).

Our Puranas speak of the Manasarovar as having originated out of the mind (*manas*) of Brahma, the Creator. Gods and goddesses are said to resort to this lake for their bath and water games. Tibetans also tell the story of Lake Manasarovar (Mapham Tso). It is related that Cakravarti Raja Nug Bam was preparing cooked rice to feed the entire world. The strained gruel from this rice cooled and became Lake Manasarovar. Here winds blow at a terrific speed — 80 to 120 kms. per hour! When we approached the lake, the water was ice-cold and winds were blowing at full speed. We waited for some time and when it subsided we decided to go for a ritualistic bath and worship. But as soon as we came out of the water, the wind again started blowing.

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However, we bathed in the icy waters which, strangely enough, brought relief to our tired limbs. The beauty of the lake cannot be expressed in words. We found that the colour of the water in the lake changed every few minutes, probably due to the change in the sky. We tried to look for the famous lotuses and swans (Rajahamsa) but could not find any. We had to be content with the sighting of sea gulls and white water fowls! There were lots of fish in the river. After worshipping the holy waters, we returned to our rooms and performed a *homa* (fire sacrifice). We also visited the Lake Rakshasa Tal a few kilometres away. Located at the foothills of the Gurla Mandhata Range of mountains, the large lake is held in awe by pilgrims. It is said that humans do not venture into the lake. Nobody touches the waters of this lake since it belongs to the Rakshasas (demons). Nevertheless, it is a beautiful lake but we found stark contrast to the Lake Manasarovar in the colour. While the waters of Lake Manasarovar appeared to be turquoise in colour, that of Lake Rakshasa Tal seemed to be of dark hue. According to the Hindu legends, the demon-king Ravana, who was a great devotee of Lord Shiva, performed many austerities and asked a boon of the Lord: that the Lord should come and reside in his kingdom, Lanka, leaving the Kailas valley. The Lord agreed, being pleased with Ravana's devotion, and offered Himself to Ravana as a lingam subject to one condition that Ravana would not keep Him down on the earth anywhere on the way. The gods in the heavens became worried: how can they let the Lord leave His Abode? They instructed the God of Water, Varuna, to enter Ravana's stomach. When he started walking with the heavy Shiva-lingam, Ravana felt that he had to ease himself urgently. But how could he do that without putting down the heavy lingam? He searched for someone who could retain it for some time. He spotted a young Brahmin, who was none other than Lord Ganesha, and requested him to hold the lingam. The Brahmin lad readily agreed. But since the God of Water himself had inhabited Ravana's stomach, there was a continuous flow of water out of Ravana which formed this lake Rakshasa Tal (also called Ravana Tal). Since Ravana was delaying, the Brahmin could not hold the lingam any longer and put it down. Thus, the Holy Lingam in the form of Kailas remained in its original place. Here also, very strong winds did not permit us to remain for long.

We returned to our camp and spent our evening in thinking of the exquisite beauty of Lake Manasarovar. Some pilgrims have claimed that they could hear the sounds caused by the tinkling of bells worn on the feet by the gods and water splashing in the waters of the lake during the evenings. I was anxious to listen to any such sound — the sounds made by the water-sporting gods who come for bathing in the waters of this lake. I even came out of my room a few times during the late evening hours to see any unusual activity in the waters — but I should say I was not so fortunate!

On the tenth day of our pilgrimage, some of us got up early in the morning and went to the Lake to see the grand natural scenery presented before us. If this is not paradise, where could it be? We bade farewell to Lake Manasarovar and proceeded towards Darchen. We had a last glimpse of the Holy Mount Kailas and offered ourselves mentally at the feet of Lord Shiva. We prayed that He be kind enough to call us again to enjoy proximity to Him.

We returned to Kathmandu after another four days of travel along sand dunes, rocky mountains and unpaved roads, but carrying with us the most precious experience of our lives. As we took leave of the wonderful Valley of Gods, the last message of Saint Milarepa rang in our ears:

Lama, yidam, and dakini,
three united in one — Invoke them!
Perfect seeing, contemplation,
and practice,
three united in one — Master them!
This life, the next, and the intermediate,
three united in one — Unify them!❐

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Swami Vivekananda: The Muses' Darling

DR. VISVANATH CHATTERJEE

A resident of Calcutta, Dr. Visvanath Chatterjee analyses in this short article some of the utterances of Swami Vivekananda and pays lofty tributes to him.

Swami Vivekananda is one of the greatest orators of all times. He is a master of the *spoken* word; he is a master of the persuasive prose. So is he a 'lord of language' in a special and more literal sense — the word *language* being derived from the Latin *lingua*, meaning 'the tongue'. He is also a very fine writer, both in English and Bengali. He was one of the first to champion the cause of colloquial Bengali as a medium of serious writing and himself practised what he preached with tremendous effect. His letters, essays and travelogues published in the *Udbodhan*, the Bengali monthly journal founded by him in 1899, bear eloquent testimony to this. (These were later collected in books entitled *Parivrājak, Prācya O Pāścāttya, Bhābbār Kathā*, and *Patrāvalī*. Suniti Kumar Chatterji felicitously described Rabindranath Tagore as '*Vāk-pati*' (the Lord of language). This epithet can be used no less appositely for the Swami. The usual Bengali expression is: '*Vāṇīr varaputra*' (the favoured son of Goddess Sarasvatī). The corresponding idiomatic expression in English is 'the Muses' darling', the words George Peele used to describe his contemporary Elizabethan dramatist of the 'mighty line', Christopher Marlowe.

Some of the fascinating qualities of Vivekananda's speeches, especially the Chicago ones, have been analysed and discussed in the present writer's essay, 'The Living Voice'[1], in which relevant tributes from distinguished critics like Dr. K.R.S. Iyengar and Dr. M.K. Naik are also quoted. Amalendu Bose gives the title to one of his papers 'Vivekananda: Lord of Language'[2]. William James subscribes to the view when he writes: 'I have just been reading some of Vivekananda's Addresses in England, which I had not seen. That man is simply *a wonder for oratorical power*....the Swami is an honour to humanity, in any case.'[3]

Romain Rolland, a master of French prose and a connoisseur of music, appreciated the musical quality of Vivekananda's language:

> His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel choruses. I cannot touch these sayings of his, scattered as they are through the pages of books at thirty years' distance, without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock. And what shocks, what transports must have been produced when in burning words they issued from the lips of the hero![4]

For Rolland, Vivekananda was energy personified. For him, as for Beethoven, thought Rolland, energy was the root of all the virtues. Like the language of Marlowe, Vivekananda's language is vibrant with energy. Unlike Marlowe, however, the Swami was not primarily a poet. But his prose is often

1. Visvanath Chatterjee, 'The Living Voice,' in *Swami Vivekananda: A Hundred Years Since Chicago* (Belur, 1994), pp. 85–96.
2. A. Bose, 'Vivekananda: Lord of Language,' in *The Other Harmony* (Calcutta, 1977).
3. *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1967, p. 133. Emphasis added.
4. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1984), p. 146.

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shot with poetic qualities. And the few moving poems that he wrote in English and Bengali reveal the soul of a writer who was 'himself ... a true Poem'[5].

Another foreign writer, Leo Tolstoy, a great master of Russian prose, appreciated Vivekananda's great mastery of the English language: 'What English has Vivekananda! He has learnt all its subtleties. It is even his weak point, he is too eloquent.'[6]

Jawaharlal Nehru, himself a distinguished orator and well known for his excellent command of the English language, observed: 'And I think that our younger generation will take advantage of this fountain of wisdom, of spirit and fire, that flows through Swami Vivekananda.'[7] The 'spirit and fire' is a very significant expression, for, as in the case of Marlowe, Vivekananda's raptures were all air and fire.[8]

One of the factors that greatly contributed to the magnificence of Vivekananda's language is his nobility of spirit. What Milton wrote about a good book is equally true of a good speech: 'the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life'[9]. Vivekananda is certainly a master-spirit, if ever there was one. He believes in and preaches purity of mind and body and is himself an epitome of purity. And he is not only pure in himself, but the cause that purity is in other men. It is no wonder that he can express himself with such force and vigour in passages like the following.

The first one is concerned with man's intrinsic purity:

> If you are really pure, how do you see the impure? For what is within, is without. We cannot see impurity without having it inside ourselves. This is one of the practical sides of Vedanta, and I hope that we shall all try to carry it into our lives.[10]

The second passage sums up the essence of religion:

> ...the secret of religion lies not in theories but in practice. To be good and to do good — that is the whole of religion. 'Not he that crieth "Lord", "Lord", but he that doeth the will of the Father'.[11]

And Vivekananda considers courage and morality to be synonymous:

> Be moral. Be brave. Be a heart-whole man. Strictly moral, brave unto desperation. Don't bother your head with religious theories. Cowards only sin, brave men never, no, not even in mind.[12]

The next passage describes the efficacy of *brahmacharya* or chastity:

> One man may speak beautiful language and beautiful thoughts, but they do not impress people; another man speaks neither beautiful language nor beautiful thoughts, yet his words charm. Every movement of his is powerful. That is the power of *Ojas*. ...It is only the chaste man or woman who can make the *Ojas* rise and store it in the brain; that is why chastity has always been considered the highest virtue. A man feels that if he is unchaste, spirituality goes away, he loses mental vigour and moral stamina. That is why in all the religious orders in the world which have produced spiritual giants you will always

5. '...he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true Poem.' J. Milton, 'An Apology for Smectymnus', *Selected Prose*, ed., C.A. Patrides, Hermondsworth, 1974, p. 62.
6. A. Shifman, *Tolstoy and India* (New Delhi, 1978), p. 34.
7. *Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1960), p. 16.
8. '...his [Marlowe's] raptures were / All air and fire' — M. Drayton, 'Of Poets and Poetry'.
9. J. Milton, *Areopagitica*, op. cit., p. 201.
10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983), vol. 2, p. 327. [Hereafter, *CW*.]
11. *CW*, vol. 6, p. 245.
12. *CW*, vol. 5, p. 3.

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find absolute chastity insisted upon.[13] It is this *Ojas* or spirit which animates every word that Vivekananda speaks or writes (even his personal letters in English and Bengali are full of such soul-animating strains) and it is because of this that his voice is still a 'living' voice. *Ojas* is the quality which Romain Rolland describes as 'energy'.

It is because of this *Ojas* (energy) that Vivekananda's *vāṇī* (language) is so *Ojasvinī* (spirited), and this makes his speeches at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, so elevating, so memorable. Here are a few words from his speech on 26 September 1893 in the context of his ideas on Buddhism as the fulfilment of Hinduism:

> Whatever may be the position of philosophy, whatever may be the position of metaphysics, so long as there is such a thing as death in the world, so long as there is such a thing as weakness in the human heart, so long as there is a cry going out of the heart of man in his very weakness, there shall be a faith in God.[14]

Vivekananda must have enjoyed the special gifts of the gods. Otherwise it would not have been possible for him to interpret the philosophy of Vedanta so beautifully and so effectively. Here is a passage remarkable for its mystic monistic music:

> When man has seen himself as one with the Infinite Being of the universe, when all separateness has ceased, when all men and women, all gods and angels, all animals and plants, and the whole universe have melted into that Oneness, then all fear disappears. Can I hurt myself? Can I kill myself? Can I injure myself? Whom to fear? Can you fear yourself? Then will all sorrow disappear. What can cause me sorrow? I am the One Existence of the universe. Then all jealousies will disappear; of whom to be jealous? Of myself? Then all bad feelings disappear. Against whom can I have bad feeling? Against myself? There is none in the universe but I. And this is the one way, says the Vedantist, to Knowledge. Kill out this differentiation, kill out this superstition that there are many. 'He who in this world of many sees that One, he who in this mass of insentiency sees that one Sentient Being, he who in this world of shadows catches that Reality, unto him belongs eternal peace, unto none else, unto none else.'[15]

Here is indeed 'Vedanta for Everyman,' Vedanta without tears. To understand this passage is to realize the real meaning of Vedanta.

The quotation at the end of the above passage reveals one of the secrets of Vivekananda's effective speeches, his unique oratory. He often adapts or changes scriptural passages, while translating, to suit his purpose. (One may wonder if his memory played tricks with him sometimes but this is very unlikely as he had a splendid memory.) The original of the present quotation is to be found in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (II.ii.13):

Nityo'nityānāṁ cetanaścetanānāṁ
eko bahūnāṁ yo vidadhāti kāmān;
Tam-ātmasthaṁ ye'nupaśyanti dhīrā-
steṣāṁ śāntiḥ śāśvatī netareṣām.

This passage has been translated by S. Radhakrishnan as follows:

> The one eternal amid the transient, the conscious amid the conscious, the one amid many, who grants desires, to the wise who perceive Him as abiding in the soul, to them is eternal peace and to no other.[16]

R.E. Hume translates the *śloka* thus:

> Him who is the
> Constant among the inconstant,
> the Intelligent among the intelligences,
> The One among many,
> who grants desires—
> The wise who perceive Him
> as standing in oneself,

13. *CW*, vol. 1, pp. 169–70.
14. *CW*, vol. 1, p. 22.
15. *CW*, vol. 2, pp. 251–2.
16. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads* (London, 1953), p. 640.

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They, and no others,
have eternal peace![17]

As both the other translations clearly indicate, Vivekananda has taken liberties with the original text. His is a homocentric approach and more emphasis is placed by him on the mortal beholder than on the Immortal beheld because the Swami begins with the beholder who is mentioned thrice. In fact, in a sense, Vivekananda is looking through the wrong end of the telescope. But this he does deliberately. For one thing, he has the nature of his American audience in mind, to whom he is explaining the nature of Atman (Soul). For another, he wants to lay stress on the One who remains (while the many change and pass) with whom everybody can be identified, in whom all merge. That is why the third point in the original, *eko bahūnām*, is made the first by Vivekananda. The idea of Divine Providence, as found in *yo vidadhāti kāmān*, is omitted by him altogether as it is irrelevant for his present purpose. *Tam-ātmastham ye'nupaśyanti* is changed altogether into 'he who in *this world of shadows* catches that Reality'. Perhaps Vivekananda, himself romantic to the tips of his fingers, has been here influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by these beautiful lines from Shelly's *Adonais* (he loved the poetry of Shelly as much as he loved that of Wordsworth and Byron):

The One remains, the many change
and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines,
Earth's shadows fly.

In the original Sanskrit *netareṣām* occurs only once. Vivekananda intentionally repeats 'unto none else' for a powerful incantatory effect.

Time and again we find Vivekananda speaking about India and the Indians with usual eloquence, and no wonder, because he is a true patriot and his feelings for his country and countrymen are as sincere as they are intense. In his reply to the Madras Address, he said:

> India will be raised, not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit; not with the flag of destruction, but with the flag of peace and love. ...one vision I see clear as life before me: that the ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on Her throne rejuvenated, more glorious than ever. Proclaim Her to all the world with the voice of peace and benediction.[18]

Vivekananda truly realized that traditionally India is not a *bhogabhūmi* (a country given to enjoyment of pleasures), the land of the heart's desire where material enjoyment and creature comforts are the Alpha and Omega of life. On the other hand, our tradition enjoins us to look upon our country as a *karmabhūmi* (the land given to performance of duty) where we are born to do our duties dispassionately, and not to reduce our birth to mere oblivion, a condition of sleep and forgetting. To read the inspiring 'winged words' of Vivekananda is to be reminded of the fact that the spiritual (*cinmaya*) is more important than the material (*annamaya*), the eternal more important than the ephemeral, that human beings who are made in God's own image, cannot, at least should not, live by bread alone.

What Vivekananda wrote in original Bengali in *Memoirs of European Travel*, about the India of his dreams, has not lost its force even today. This is clear even from the version of the anonymous translator:

> Let her [New India] arise — out of the peasants' cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler, and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts, and from markets. Let her emerge from groves and forests, from hills and mountains.[19]

The British rule is now a chapter of history but

17. R.E. Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* (Madras, 1949), p. 357.

18. *CW*, vol. 4, pp. 352–3.

19. *CW*, vol. 7, p. 327.

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it is a thousand pities that, even after fifty years of India's independence, the New India of Vivekananda's vision is yet to emerge as a reality. Linguistically, the style is characteristic of the Swami's speeches and writings in English and Bengali. 'Let her...' is repeated four times, each time with a new and stronger effect. The incantatory effect mentioned earlier is also there.

Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), although a foreigner, could write English extremely well. His tradition, however, was more or less the Western tradition. It is altogether different with Vivekananda. Even then, his English sparkles with choice words and measured phrases; what is more, it is never above the reach of ordinary men. It appears to be absolutely extraordinary when we think that Vivekananda was speaking or writing a foreign language with such ease and mastery at such a young age, that he was only thirty when he addressed the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, and that he was not a product of any missionary 'English-medium' school. What wonderful English (and Bengali also, for that matter) does Vivekananda speak and write — it is surely a gift from the Muses! ❐

I Am That One

BHIKKU VISHUDDHAPUTTA

Bhikku Vishuddhaputta is the pen-name of the author of this poem with a Vedantic message.

Is death the last word of a life?
O Death, will you pronounce the same
judgement
For one who spent all one's life
Meditating on God
Doing good to all,
And one who was a devil
Always harming others
And enjoying life
Like a brute?

Do you send the pious
To heaven,
Consigning the sinner
To hell? —
To live there in what would seem
an eternity!

Is this body the all?
Or, is Man deathless —
And lives on
Even when the body dies?

What the Rishis taught,
What a Buddha preached,
Are all that false?
No. O Death, false *you* are!
You rule over this world
Which is but Maya —
A mirage in the sandy desert.

I *know*
I am the Atman,
Ever free.
There is no death for me,
Nor birth.
I am That One —
Eternal Existence,
Eternal Joy,
And Eternal Love. ❐

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Is Money Everything, Then?

Money can buy…

Gift	*but not*	Love
A Bed	*but not*	Sleep
Food	*but not*	Appetite
Finery	*but not*	Beauty
A House	*but not*	A home
Labour	*but not*	Service
Medicine	*but not*	Health
Rituals	*but not*	Salvation
Luxuries	*but not*	Joy
Books	*but not*	Knowledge
Amusement	*but not*	Happiness
Comforts	*but not*	Peace of mind
Passport to anywhere in the world	*but not*	To the inner world

Is money everything, then?

* Received through Br. Prajnachaitanya, Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore.

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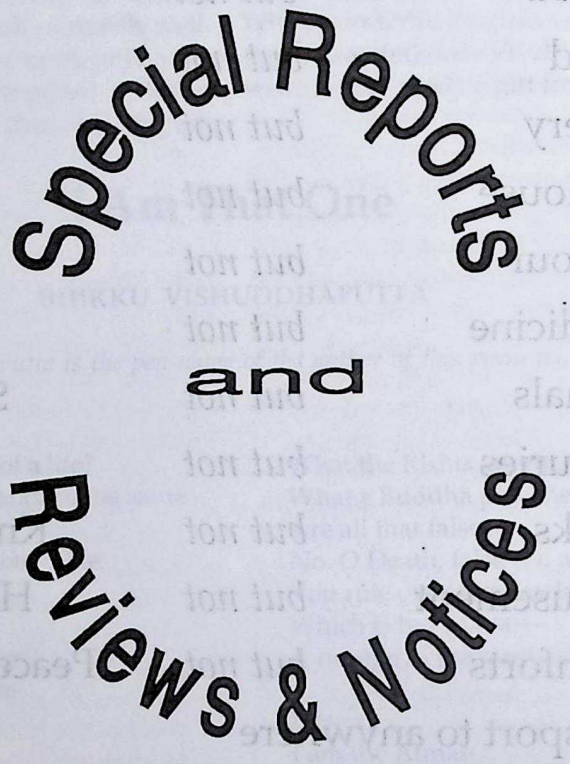

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Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar, in Twenty-Five Years

SWAMI GIRIJESHANANDA

In the following pages we have an impressive report of the work of the Ramakrishna Mission in a rural area of India. Swami Girijeshanandaji is the Secretary of the Ashrama.

Swami Vivekananda had said, 'he who serves man serves God' and what better way is there to serve a nation such as ours than to give the gift of education to our people? Behind the bricks, cement and hard labour of some dedicated people, this idea forms the foundation on which rests Narottam Nagar Centre of the Ramakrishna Mission.

This centre, situated in the middle of deciduous forests and undulating landscape of Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh, was started in 1971 for providing educational facilities to the boys of the state. Today, it has almost become a miniature Arunachal Pradesh since students come here from different parts of Arunachal Pradesh and speak different languages and profess different religious faiths.

The Mission has its services open to all irrespective of caste, creed and nationality, its special field of action being education and social welfare. It has been trying to impart quality education based on the ideas and ideals of Swami Vivekananda, retaining at the same time the best traditions of the country while instructing them in modern arts, science, crafts and other vocational pursuits.

Be it a leading political personality or an average villager, a bright young educated man or an uneducated farmer, Narottam Nagar Centre inspires hope in everyone's heart. What is being done here has been dubbed as *'Jungal mein Mangal'* (welfare in a jungle) by the most prominent leader of this area. The Chief of Doidam village says: 'The Centre at Narottam Nagar is a blessing for this area. We are extremely lucky that the Swamijis have decided to work here.' The Chief of New Doidam goes one step further and says: 'If we can persuade the Swamijis to open another centre like Narottam Nagar in this area, that will be the best service we can do to our people.' The common men of villages such as Mopaya, Namsang, Doidam, Sipini, unanimously declare that the Narottam Nagar Centre has been the greatest boon to the people of this region. Wherever one goes in the Tirap District, one finds a sense of deep gratitude in the hearts of the people. Perhaps the most touching testimony to the achievements of the Centre is expressed by the father of a child who had failed in the admission test and could not enter the school as a student. With tears rolling down his cheeks he declared softly: 'The gates of heaven had opened for him ... but he could not enter....'

The activities of this Centre are as follows:

1. A Residential English Medium Higher Secondary School permanently affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education, New Delhi.
2. A Library and Reading Room.
3. A Charitable Allopathic Dispensary.
4. A Sixteen-bedded Indoor Hospital for students.
5. A Natural History Museum.
6. An Art Gallery.
7. An Audio-Visual Unit.
8. Celebration of Local and National Festivals.
9. Religious Discourses.

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10. Philanthropic Work among the local distressed.
11. A Dairy and Poultry Unit.
12. A Mobile Dispensary serving three villages at the Centre and the surrounding villages.

Students' Home

When this Mission Centre began in 1971–72, it had only 108 students on its roll. Within a short period of 25 years this number has increased to six times bringing the present strength to 645 out of which 467 reside in two spacious hostels with separate prayer halls, study halls, dining halls, etc. On the lines of the ancient Gurukula system of education, as prescribed by the illustrious Swami Vivekananda, students live under the care of dedicated wardens, either monastic or lay, and receive from them every possible guidance required for their physical, mental, and moral growth. The regular and tight routine has always been aimed at giving a firm foundation of disciplined life to the students from their budding age and yet providing opportunities and facilities to train and participate in co-curricular activities like cultural functions, games and sports, social services, festivals, etc. in addition to studies, for their all-round development. Every year a batch of our students escorted by monastic members are taken on an educational tour to different parts of our Motherland.

The School

Like all great endeavours in history, this Centre at Narottam Nagar was also begun in a humble way with a few improvised houses which served as a school building besides housing other activities. Today, two magnificent school buildings stand in their place as silent evidences to the achievement of Man when he is dedicated to his cause, sincere in his efforts, and honest in the true sense of the word.

The foundation stone of the School was laid by Sri V.V. Giri, the then President of India on 21 April 1974 and it was inaugurated on 4 November 1978 by Sri Morarji Desai, the then Prime Minister of India. Qualified and dedicated teachers of the School have been the most effective instruments in moulding the students' lives in the light of the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. Here an attempt is made to impart all-round education to boys through English as the medium of instruction, Hindi and Sanskrit being the second and third languages respectively. Initially started as a Residential Secondary School, it was upgraded to Higher Secondary School during the year 1986. Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, the then President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, declared it open on 30 March 1986. Sri R.D. Pradhan, the then Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, opened the Students' Hostel for Higher Secondary boys on 27 March 1987.

Keeping pace with the advancement in science and technology and adopting the latest educational system, two suitably equipped Computer Laboratories have been offering plenty of scope to the students of this institution since 1993–94. So far, a total number of 337 students have joined the course of which 277 studied under the scheme of 'Socially Useful Productive Work' whereas the remaining 60 students chose to study the subject according to the syllabus prescribed by the Central Board of Secondary Education, New Delhi. They all came out successfully.

The Library and Reading Room, separate for the Secondary and Higher Secondary levels, have a total of 11,159 books costing Rs. 2,80,000/-. The Reference Section of the Libraries is utilized by teachers and students for in-depth study. The Children's Section has been invariably found to be very busy and lively.

Extra-ordinary Achievements in Educational Field

Since its inception, the institution has been sending out brilliant students who have made their Alma Mater proud through constant good results and high achievements in both co-curricular and extra-curricular fields. Some of the students who have passed out

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from here have been devotedly serving the society in covetable positions while some others have been pursuing higher studies successfully.

Academically the students have really upheld the name of the school by performing brilliantly and securing good marks as is evident from the results of the AISSC Examination. Though there has been cent per cent success throughout, we are proud to mention that all the students passed in the first division during the years 1979, 1991 and 1993. In the process, they have bagged 34 Government and 3 prestigious private scholarships, and have topped the State Merit List six times.

Extra-Academic Sphere

In addition to their curriculum, the students are encouraged to take part in various other activities. In this too they have come out with flying colours. Since 1982, our students have been participating in District, State and National Level Science Seminar and Science Exhibitions.

Many boys, especially those from this region, have got the natural gift for different skills. For profitably nurturing and cultivating these skills, the Institution has ample provision for supplementary education in the form of various activities such as gardening, tailoring, typewriting, cane-work, painting, drawing, dramatic performances, music, debates, elocution, quiz, etc. under the supervision of qualified teachers. In the extra-curricular activities, the students have won plenty of awards and prizes both on the basis of individual merit and as a team. To mention a few:

1. Sri Manwant Lowang: Recipient of President's Gallantry Award in 1976.
2. Sri Ahuwa Wangsy: The Best Athlete in the State in 1986.
3. Gold and Silver Medals in National Level Art Competitions: 7 times.
4. Gold and Silver Medals in National and State Level Essay Competitions: 5 times.
5. First and Second places in National and State Level Science Seminars and Exhibitions: 20 times.
6. The School Team: District Champions in Football in 1988 and 1990; Runners-Up in State Level Gymnastics in 1989; Best in Discipline and Cleanliness in Inter-District Sports Meet in 1978; Champions in APFC Football Tournament in 1980.

Festivals and Celebrations

National festivals like Republic Day, Independence Day, Teachers' Day are observed with great joy and enthusiasm.

The birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and other local festivals are observed with due solemnity and joy. On these occasions, students speak on the life and teachings of these great personalities. Students also worship Mother Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning. Birthdays of Lord Buddha, Sri Krishna, and Lord Jesus Christ are also observed.

Help, Awards, Scholarships and Prizes

Meritorious but poor and needy students are always given a helping hand by way of pecuniary help, awards and scholarships. Their achievements in both curricular and extra-curricular activities are duly recognized and suitably awarded. Some awards and prizes have been earmarked for staff members to acknowledge their dedicated services. The institution has spent in 1996-97 a total sum of Rs. 3,39,660/- towards this purpose of which Rs. 82,520/- was towards pecuniary help, Rs. 34,520 towards scholarships and awards, and Rs. 2,22,620 towards prizes. The Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur has been granting scholarships to meritorious students.

The following awards are granted annually:

1. *Governor's Award* for the Highest Marks in the CBSE Class X examination.
2. *Ma Sarada Award* for the Highest Marks in Mathematics in Class V.
3. *Nachiketa Award* for good behaviour.

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4. *Mahavir Award* for the best attendance and proficiency in Physical Education.
5. *Silver Medal* for the Best All-rounder student instituted by 192 Mountain Brigade.
6. *Silver Jubilee Award* for the Best Senior Teacher.
7. *Silver Jubilee Award* for the Best Junior Teacher.
8. *Silver Jubilee Award* for the Best Warden.
9. *Sri Ramakrishna Memorial Talent Award* for securing highest marks in English, Hindi, Mathematics, Science, Social Science in All India Secondary School (Class X) Examination.

Cultural Programmes

Cultural programmes go a long way in nurturing and exposing the potential of students as regards their ability to interact with others as well as presenting themselves as they are. Hence these are held as adjunct to studies. Experience has shown that the talents of the boys of this region, when given proper guidance and encouragement, can grow into glorious presentation during performances on stage and off it.

The following cultural programmes are usually held on Sunday evenings and prizes are distributed to the best three in each item:

1. Recitation in English, Hindi and Sanskrit.
2. Debates.
3. Quiz (separately for Senior and Junior Groups)
4. Skit for various age groups.
5. One Act Play Competition.
6. Declamation and Extempore Speech Competition.
7. Fancy Dress Competition for all age groups.
8. Solo and Group Song Competition.
9. Solo and Group Dance Competition.

Annual Sports and Athletic Meet

On various occasions Swami Vivekananda in his speeches and writings placed enormous stress on the development of the body through sports and games. He has advised us to 'play football' rather than 'study the Gita'. He has urged us to build up 'muscles of iron and nerves of steel' and has defined 'strength' as 'life itself'. The Annual Sports and Athletic Meet, to which all our students eagerly look forward, has been one of the most important features of the institution. The Marathon Race, usually organized every year to mark the National Youth Day, attracts a large number of enthusiastic participants who run from Deomali to Narottam Nagar, a distance of 8 kilometres.

Annual Prize-giving Ceremony

On the occasion of the Annual Prize-giving Ceremony, a rare opportunity of coming in touch with important persons in society is provided to our students. The invitees also enjoy the company of simple-hearted boys studying in the institution. As the occasion gives the students a much-needed sense of achievement, it gives them maximum joy and the ceremony holds special importance for everyone.

Dairy and Poultry-keeping

The Dairy and the Poultry Unit has cows, broilers and layers. The Unit serves in providing fresh milk, eggs, and meat to the kitchen for the benefit of the resident students and staff.

Medical Aid

Almost from the inception of the institution, students and staff are provided with medical aid under a qualified doctor assisted by a qualified pharmacist and an attendant. The institution has its own hospital with provision for ten general beds and a separate room for cases requiring isolation. Till March 1997 the indoor department has served 11,934 cases of which 8843 were children, while the outdoor treated 1,56,031 cases (male 52,917; female 3172; and children 99,942).

Mobile Medical Services

One of the important ways in which Narottam Nagar Centre has endeared itself to the local populace is by bringing relief and joy into their lives through its Mobile Medical Unit, which has been attracting increasing attention from year to year. During the six-

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teen years of its service, it has treated a total number of 30,602 patients (male 8,631; female 7,163; children 14,808) covering over twenty villages around Narottam Nagar.

Silver Jubilee Celebrations

The Centre at Narottam Nagar reached a milestone in its history when it celebrated its silver jubilee in the year 1996. The celebrations started on 1 July 1996 with a special worship to mark the auspicious occasion. The inaugural ceremony of the Silver Jubilee was held on the 13th and 14th July 1996. Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, the then General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, graced the occasion. Sri Mata Prasadji, the Honourable Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, inaugurated the function on 13 July. Sri Wangcha Rajkumar (Member of the Parliament) was also present. Sri T.L. Rajkumar, Minister of Health of Arunachal Pradesh, addressed the gathering on 14 July. Many ex-students, guardians, devotees and friends were among the audience.

Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj exhorted the students to imbibe the teachings of Swamiji for their all-round growth. In his heart-touching speech, he appealed for the help and cooperation of everyone in carrying out the work of the Mission. While speaking on the occasion, Sri Mata Prasadji praised the unique work of the Ramakrishna Mission and advised the students to follow the teachings of Swami Vivekananda to serve the poor and the down-trodden. On this joyous occasion Sri Wangcha Rajkumar (M.P. and an ex-student of the institution) recalled his good old days in the school and advised students to be good in all respects as they were receiving education from an ideal and model school in the country. In his address Sri T.L. Rajkumar, hailing from Tirap District, pointed out the commendable efforts and achievements of Sri K.A.A. Raja in bringing the Ramakrishna Mission to the Tirap District. He thanked the Mission authorities for their yeoman services in the field of education and for their welfare services particularly to the people of Tirap.

Our Thanks

We gratefully acknowledge the most valuable contribution of Sri K.A.A. Raja, the then Lt. Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, to the people of Tirap District especially. But for his dedicated, sincere and helpful cooperation the Centre at Narottam Nagar would not have seen the light of day. We are deeply thankful to the Chiefs of Namsang and Borduria for their generous and whole-hearted donation of land and property for the service of the local people, especially the children. We thank also the State and Central Governments, Namsang-Borduria Fund Committee as well as our friends and admirers scattered all over the country for their help in various ways over the years which enables us to maintain the present standard of service to the community. ❐

This is the gist of all worship—to be pure and to do good to others. He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race, or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples.

He who wants to serve the father must serve the children first. He who wants to serve Shiva must serve His children—must serve all creatures in the world first.

—*Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, pp. 258-9

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Vivekananda Retreat Inaugurated

A REPORT BY SISTER GARGI

On Saturday, June 27, 1998, in the mid-Hudson Valley of New York State, Vivekananda Retreat, Ridgely, was inaugurated as a branch of the Ramakrishna Math by **Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj**, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order of India. To millions of Swami Vivekananda's devotees the world over, who have long looked upon the estate of Ridgely as a place of pilgrimage, this was a wonderful and historic event. It was at Ridgely that the great Swami Vivekananda spent the longest vacation of his life — some ten weeks in the late summer and early fall of 1899. He was there also for two short stays in 1895, and the vibrancy of his being is still felt as a living presence. Now the property of 83 acres, on which stands the large manor house, in which Swami Vivekananda spent most of his time during his stays, and two other large houses that were also on the property, has become not only a place of pilgrimage, but a retreat where spiritual aspirants may spend days, weeks, or months imbibing its holy atmosphere.

The Swami's hosts in 1899 at Ridgely were Francis H. Leggett, a wealthy businessman of New York, and his wife, Besse Sturges Leggett. Among the Swami's now-well-known fellow guests were his brother monks Swamis Turiyananda and Abhedananda, Besse Leggett's sister, Josephine MacLeod, a great admirer of the Swami's, his English disciple Sister Nivedita, and his American disciple Mrs. Ole Bull. It was a great house party, a great summer!

After Francis Leggett's death in 1909, the Ridgely property, which he had purchased in 1892, came into the caring hands of his descendants: his daughter, Mrs. Frances Leggett, and in recent times, his grandson, Lord Francis Margesson. In the 1980s the property came up for sale.

It was in the last days of March of 1997 that the Trustees of the Ramakrishna Order resolved during their annual meeting at Belur Math (the Headquarters near Calcutta) that if enough money could be raised to purchase the Ridgely property, the Ramakrishna Math would accept it as a retreat centre to be conducted by a Swami of the Order. Once that resolution was made, things moved rapidly. Swami Swahananda, Head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, was appointed by the Trustees as the spiritual leader of the proposed Retreat, and Swami Atmarupananda, who was at that time posted to the Vedanta Society of San Diego, was chosen to be the Swami-in-Residence at Ridgely.

In mid-July of 1997, a down payment on the property was made and money was donated to cover the expenses of a feasibility study, legal proceedings, renovations to the buildings required for their public use, and so on. Construction work commenced. On 11 October, a dedication ceremony took place in the new shrine room in the manor house. And now, fifteen months after the initial resolve was taken at Belur Math, the Vivekananda Retreat has been officially inaugurated and is today open wide for the use of earnest spiritual aspirants.

The Retreat is the first Vedanta Retreat Centre to be started in America. While most of the Ramakrishna Order's American Vedanta centres have retreats of their own, the centre at Ridgely will be a retreat in itself, open year round. Meditation sessions and daily spiritual classes will be held for retreatants by the resident Swami. In addition, interfaith conferences and seminars for groups of people wanting to explore means

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of applying spiritual principles to their day-to-day lives, will be offered now and then during the year. (For additional information please see the Retreat's website: www.ridgely.org)

The Inauguration ceremonies, presided over by **Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji**, who had come to America for this purpose, extended over the weekend of July 26 to 28. Preliminary to the Inauguration weekend and as an accompaniment to it, the renowned author (*The World's Religions*) and speaker, **Dr. Huston Smith**, came from the West Coast at the invitation of the Retreat's board of directors to give a lecture. During his talk, which was given at the Ulster County Community College, fortuitously near the Retreat property, Dr. Smith pointed out the deplorable 'scientism' that is today dominating world thought and spoke of 'the light at the end of the tunnel' — the turn of present-day thought toward a recognition of a reality beyond matter and the possibility of our having knowledge of that reality through spiritual awareness. The talk, which was well attended, was a fitting introduction to the inauguration of a spiritual retreat.

On Friday evening, July 26, in the spacious hall of the MacLeod House, which is one of the three houses on the Retreat property and is currently used as retreat quarters for women, an informal gathering of Swamis and devotees was held. About one hundred devotees attended. Among the Swamis were **Swami Atmasthanandaji, Swami Swahananda, Swami Pramathananda** of Toronto, **Swami Atmarupananda, Swami Sarvadevananda**, Assistant Minister of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, **Swami Atmajnanananda**, Swami-in-Residence at the new Vedanta Centre in Washington, D.C., and **Swami Vimalatmananda**, Private Secretary to the Vice-President. Each of the last three Swamis mentioned gave a brief and lively talk touching on some aspect of Swami Vivekananda's connection with Ridgely. **Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana** of Sri Sarada Math in India, who was visiting the Retreat, was also requested to speak. The Pravrajika, author of the book *The Life of Josephine MacLeod*, told a number of interesting anecdotes concerning Miss MacLeod, adding to the enjoyment of the evening. After the talks were over, a filling supper was served to everyone by volunteers. Incidentally, these ten or twelve volunteers, men and women both, worked like cheerful trojans throughout the weekend, shopping, cooking, serving, cleaning up, and doing whatever needed to be done. It was karma yoga to the hilt and for those fortunate enough to step behind the scenes, an inspiration to witness!

Saturday, July 27, was the big day — the Inauguration Day proper. A tent, rented for the occasion, was erected behind the main house on one of the spacious lawns of Ridgely. A more or less private programme for devotees started in the tent at 10:30 a.m. On the platform were **Swami Atmasthanandaji, Swami Swahananda, Swami Tathagatananda** of the Vedanta Society of New York, **Swami Aparananda** of the Vedanta Society of Berkeley, **Swami Pramathananda** of the Vedanta Society of Toronto, and all the other Swamis and the Pravrajika who had attended the function the evening before. The display of gerua, the ochre cloth worn by Indian monastics, was impressive. A puja was performed at the altar set up at the back of the platform, on which were enshrined Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. Talks were given by **Swami Tathagatananda, Swami Aparananda**, and **Swami Pramathananda.** Large platters of flowers were then placed at the front of the platform, and the assembled devotees came forward in pairs to offer handfuls of flowers to the Deity. This took considerably longer than the fifteen minutes allotted to it in the programme, but the atmosphere of devotion that built up during the offering was palpable. According to the programme, **Revered Swami Atmasthananadaji** was then to hold a *satsang*, a 'question-and-answer session'; in-

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stead, in keeping with the mood that prevailed, he read from the *Vakya Vritti*, a work by Shankaracharya, and gave an inspiring commentary on the text. At the close of the morning programme, a bountiful buffet lunch was served on the lawn.

The afternoon session of the inaugural programme was open to the public and began at 3:00 p.m. Over four hundred people filled the tent and were welcomed in a short talk by **Swami Swahananda. Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji** then gave the keynote address, an inspiring dissertation on Swami Vivekananda's role in the world today and on the shape of things to come due to the Swami's extraordinary God-directed mission. At the close, he spoke of the importance of the establishment of the Retreat, sacred to Vivekananda, and officially opened it as one of the West's spiritual havens and a centre of increasingly vital spiritual growth. The audience was intently interested by the Swami's talk, and joyful as well, catching some of his own vitality and enthusiasm, which was not in the least dampened by the rain that pounded now and then on the tent roof.

Following the Swami's talk, **Marie Louise Burke (Sister Gargi),** author of the six-volume work *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, read a short paper (see earlier in this issue) on Swami Vivekananda's life at Ridgely, relating various incidents of his stays there. **Lord Margesson** then told of the vital part that his mother, Mrs. Frances Leggett, had played in the preservation of Ridgely. Without the love and care that she bestowed upon the estate, Margesson pointed out, the place would not exist today. At the close of the talks, refreshments were served on the lawn.

The late afternoon programme, which consisted of music, began at 5:30 p.m. **John Schlenck**, a member of the Vedanta Society of New York and a well-known musician and composer, conducted his own composition *Days of Youth* (the second part of his musical trilogy on the life of Swami Vivekananda). The work consisted of choir, baritone soloist (**Kurt Willett**), narrator (**Spike McClure**), and synthesizer. It was a work that held everyone enraptured. Next, **Robert Vijay Gupta**, a ten-year-old prodigy of the violin, gave three numbers which brought the audience to their feet in applause, so beautiful and rich was the boy's tone and execution. A guitar duet and songs by **Naren Rauch** and **Felix McTeigue** were followed by a delicious Indian-style dinner, served to over 300 people.

Sunday, July 28, was a retreat day. 'We are inaugurating a Retreat,' Swami Atmasthanandaji had said earlier. 'Let us *have* a retreat!' A smaller crowd assembled under the tent than on the previous day, and at 9:30 a.m. the retreat opened with *puja* (worship), and the solo singing of Hindu devotional songs by **Ratna Mukherjee, Dola Sen Gupta,** and **Papiya Das Gupta.** A guided meditation was given by **Swami Atmasthanandaji,** during which a deep silence prevailed as everyone seemed drawn into a depth of being. How much time passed? One does not know. But the presence of Swami Vivekananda seemed vibrant and palpable. Then in the silence came the sonorous chanting of the Swami, and it was over. Again, a large lunch was served on the lawn by the intrepid volunteers.

Thus the Vivekananda Retreat, Ridgely, was inspiringly and auspiciously inaugurated. Although there is a long way to go before a large mortgage on the property is paid and a holed-for endowment fund sets the venture on solid ground, the Retreat is here to stay. ❐

> That immortal Brahman alone is before, that Brahman is behind, that Brahman is to the right and left. Brahman alone pervades everything above and below; this universe is that Supreme Brahman alone.
>
> —*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, II.2.11

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Vedanta Society of Kansas City — A History

MS. LINDA PRUGH

Ms. Linda Prugh, Secretary of the Vedanta Society of Kansas City, is well known to the readers of Prabuddha Bharata. *In this excellent and informative report, to be included in a proposed book about the history of Vedanta in America, she traces the growth of the Centre upto the year 1997.*

The Vedanta Society of Kansas City was officially organized in January 1965 as a coordinate body of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis. This meant that it was financially responsible for itself but pledged spiritual alliance to the St. Louis Society. However, there is considerable history of the society prior to its official founding.

Mrs. Gladys Miller of Kansas City played an important role in organizing and building the work. In the fall of 1943 she visited Trabuco College in Southern California, which had been organized and founded by Gerald Heard, noted writer and speaker on subjects of philosophical interest. The college emphasized the Vedantic teachings. Mrs. Miller found these teachings to be to her liking, but it wasn't until early 1945 when she found the name and address of Swami Satprakashananda and the Vedanta Society of St. Louis in an Indian journal that she made further significant effort in a Vedantic direction.

In April 1945 she visited Swami Satprakashananda and the Vedanta Society of St. Louis. She was so impressed that upon her return to Kansas City she immediately told her friend Ula Bergfeldt all about her visit. A few weeks later the two women made a visit to St. Louis. Ula Bergfeldt was equally impressed by the Swami's sincerity and learning.

At the invitation of Gladys Miller and Ula Bergfeldt, Swami Satprakashananda visited Kansas City for the first time on March 27, 1946. Arrangements had been made for the Swami to stay and give a talk at the Bellerive Hotel. The Bellerive was at that time a top, highly respected hotel. The Swami's talk on 'India's Spiritual Message' was well received by the audience of seventy-five. The next night the Swami spoke on 'Meditation' at the home of Ula Bergfeldt to a smaller but enthusiastic group. A number of people asked for and were granted private interviews concerning spiritual matters.

The Swami saw a potential for growth in Kansas City. He immediately put together a small collection of books which Gladys Miller agreed to house and loan out to interested persons. This small lending library formed the nucleus of a permanent and much larger library.

As interest grew, Swami Satprakashananda could see the need for classes where the details of Vedanta philosophy could be expounded and explained. During his second visit to Kansas City in September 1947 the Swami suggested that fortnightly meetings be held. Both Gladys Miller and Ula Bergfeldt offered their homes for these meetings. The meetings, held on the first and third Monday evenings, included meditation, prayer, and readings. Several years later audiotape recordings of Swami Satprakashananda's class talks on the *Bhagavad Gita*, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, or one of the Upanishads, given

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at the Vedanta Society of St. Louis were used at these meetings.

Turning Point

During the early years of 1946 through 1964, Kansas City devotees interested in the Vedanta philosophy could only become members by joining the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, because there was as yet no official organization in Kansas City. All of that changed in 1965. It came about in the following way:

In 1964 Anne Fawcett, a member of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, and active in the Kansas City group, died. She had a very small, older house in an area called the Country Club Plaza, which she left to the St. Louis Society on the condition that within one year a Vedanta Society be officially begun in Kansas City. In order not to lose this windfall, the Vedanta Society of Kansas City was legally formed as a coordinate body of the St. Louis Society.

In 1965 a membership role of the Vedanta Society of Kansas City was established. The Fawcett house was deemed too small to be used as a meeting place, so it was sold. The money from the sale of the house was held in trust by the St. Louis Society for the purpose of future work in Kansas City. That money was the nucleus for a larger fund later used to help in the purchase of the present home of the Society.

The library, which had started with forty books sent by Swami Satprakashananda had grown to 285 by 1965. It was now housed in the home of Eugene and Carol Condon. In 1967 the library was moved to the home of Ula Bergfeldt, at which time the Society also began holding Sunday morning Services as well as Monday evening classes at the Bergfeldts.

Then in 1973 there was a major restructuring of the relationship of the Kansas City Society with the St. Louis Society. Following a request which Swami Satprakashananda sent to the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order at Belur Math, India, the Vedanta Society of Kansas City was made an official branch society of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis. This arrangement lasted for three years at which time Headquarters at Belur Math had a change of heart and instructed the Vedanta Society of St. Louis to divest itself of the Kansas City Society. Swami Satprakashananda then instructed the Kansas City Society to reestablish itself as an independent body, loosely associated with the Vedanta Society of St. Louis. Accordingly, the Kansas City Society applied to the State of Missouri for a charter as a non-profit, religious corporation. In December 1976 it received a charter from the State of Missouri. In its new By-Laws the Society recognized its founding by Swami Satprakashananda and stated its spiritual allegiance to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Belur, India.

The Vedanta Society of Kansas City By-Laws state the following purposes:

> This Society is formed for purely religious and charitable purposes. Since the principal purpose of the Society is religious, it is under the spiritual guidance of the Swami-in-Charge of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, Missouri, and his successors. Specifically, the purposes of the Society are:
>
> a. To promote devotion to God and the recognition of truth in all great religions of the world.
>
> b. To promote the study, the practice, and the teaching of Vedanta Philosophy and religion in general and as expounded by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and exemplified by their lives and the lives of other spiritual leaders, seers, and saints of the world.
>
> c. To promote harmony between Eastern and Western thought.
>
> d. To aid in reasonable and lawful ways in the furtherance of the religious and charitable work of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, whose headquarters are at Belur Math, West Bengal, India, and to which this society owes spiri-

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tual allegiance.

Swami Satprakashananda visited the Vedanta Society six more times to give public lectures. He usually stayed two or three days at the Hotel Bellerive, and gave public lectures at that hotel, nearby colleges, the Philosophical Club, and the homes of Gladys Miller and Ula Bergfeldt. His last visit to Kansas City was in May 1971, at which time he conducted a Memorial Service for William Bergfeldt, Sr.

During the 1950s and 1960s, quite a few other Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order also visited the Kansas City Society, lecturing and leaving behind them the legacy of their spiritual presence. A listing of these Swamis would not be out of place here:

Swami Akhilananda, head of the Vedanta Societies of Boston and Providence; Swami Nikhilananda, head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York; Swami Nityaswarupananda, travelling on a cultural exchange program in 1963; Swami Vidyatmananda, Assistant Swami of the Society Vedantique of Gretz, France; Swami Ranganathananda of India, two times. Also visiting during the 1970s were Swamis Nihsreyasananda, South Africa; Prabuddhananda, San Francisco; Shraddhananda, Sacramento; Swahananda, Hollywood; Yogeshananda, Chicago; and Yuktananda, then Assistant Minister, Vedanta Society of St. Louis.

Swami Chetanananda

During the 1970s, Swami Satprakashananda's health kept him house-bound so the out-of-town devotees often came to St. Louis to visit him. In 1977 Swami Satprakashananda requested of Headquarters at Belur Math that an Assistant Swami be sent to look after the details of the running of the St. Louis Society. So it was that on March 1, 1978, Swami Chetanananda arrived in St. Louis, having been deputed by the Order to act as Assistant Minister. Since June 1971, he had served as Assistant Swami at the Vedanta Society of Southern California. After Swami Satprakashananda's passing away, on November 15, 1979, Swami Chetanananda was named head minister of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis by the Order.

Swami Chetanananda began to visit the Vedanta Society of Kansas City on a regular basis, his first visit being April 27-29, 1980. He stayed in a room set aside for visiting Swamis in the home of Ula Bergfeldt, where all programs took place. On Sunday evenings the Swami would lecture on Vedanta subjects. On Mondays he would give private interviews to earnest seekers. On Monday evenings, after meditation and a buffet dinner, he would give a slide presentation or a class. In 1983 the Swami changed his schedule to Friday morning arrival, returning to St. Louis on Saturday afternoon.

The Society had never had a regular shrine room. Swami Chetanananda requested that such a room be set up, and Ula Bergfeldt offered a room on the second floor of her home for this purpose. This was dedicated by the Swami on Monday, October 26, 1981.

Search for a Permanent Home

Then in 1984 the Society was moved from the home of Ula Bergfeldt to the apartment of Eugene Condon, a long-time devotee and disciple of Swami Satprakashananda. Here a shrine room was set up and maintained daily, the library was moved in, and regular services continued on Sundays.

The moving of the Society at this time emphasized the need for a permanent home. At the same time a St. Louis devotee offered a large sum of money for that purpose. Swami Chetanananda lost no time. A search for a suitable house was started immediately. Within one month a possible site had been found in the southern part of Kansas City. This house met all of the City of Kansas City's primary requirements for converting a residence to a church.

It was located on a corner.

It was across from a commercial area.

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It was across from a parkway having a minimum width of 120 feet.

It had side yards of at least 25 feet.

It had a ground-floor entrance.

It had a ground-floor restroom.

A considerable amount of alteration work was going to be necessary to ready the house for conversion to a church. One long-time Kansas City devotee came forward with a donation for this purpose. Another long-time Kansas City devotee offered half his life savings for the purchase of the house. Along with the money which the Society had saved all these years, there was now enough money to purchase the house in full and make all necessary alterations. On February 1, 1985, the contract was closed on the house. The required remodelling work was begun immediately, and the City of Kansas City granted a Certificate of Compliance to the Vedanta Society of Kansas City on May 15, 1985.

Joyful Work

A number of committees were now established to take care of the Society properly. It was considered the Master's home, his special place, and Swami Chetanananda asked the members to always offer their work to the Lord before beginning any task on those premises. At this time the following committees were established: Shrine Service, Flowers and Shrubs, Furnishings, Grounds Maintenance, Housekeeping, Library, and Publicity.

Swami Chetanananda met with the members and told them:

> This Society belongs to the Lord. We must create a beautiful, spiritual atmosphere here in the Master's place. It is by his grace that the Society can have a home. In this place there must be no jealousy or politics. There is no king or queen here. Work for the Lord out of love and joy. Serve the devotees, feeling that it is your special blessing that you may do so. When you work in the shrine, you must feel the presence of God there. Sri Ramakrishna represents love, peace, bliss, harmony, purity, unselfishness, renunciation, spirituality, and all blessed qualities. You must try to imbibe these qualities and make your lives very pure.

A weekend of dedication ceremonies was held the following September 6 and 7, 1985. The highlight of the celebration took place on Saturday morning, September 7, Krishna's birthday. Swami Chetanananda performed a five-item dedication worship. The program also included messages from Swamis Aseshananda, Bhashyananda, Sarvagatananda, and Swahananda. There were fifty-five devotees present, two having flown in from California and twenty-nine having driven from St. Louis. A combined group of Kansas City and St. Louis devotees chanted the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. A Sunday morning lecture and a film on the life of Sri Chaitanya concluded the dedication activities.

Current Activities

Weekly Services, which are held on Sunday mornings from 10:30 to 12:30, consist of meditation in the shrine, a program on a spiritual topic, and refreshments. The program often consists of a videotaped lecture by a Swami of the Ramakrishna Order. On appropriate occasions, pre-selected readings precede the lecture. These readings usually occur on centenary dates of important events in the Vedanta Movement.

The traditional birth anniversaries and other auspicious days which are observed by Vedanta centers all over the world are observed by the Society with special programs planned by devotees. Birth anniversaries are often observed with symposia on appropriate topics, short dramas, special readings, music and Vedic chanting.

On Wednesday evenings there is a Vespers Service consisting of hymns, arati, meditation, and reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

On the first Saturday morning of each

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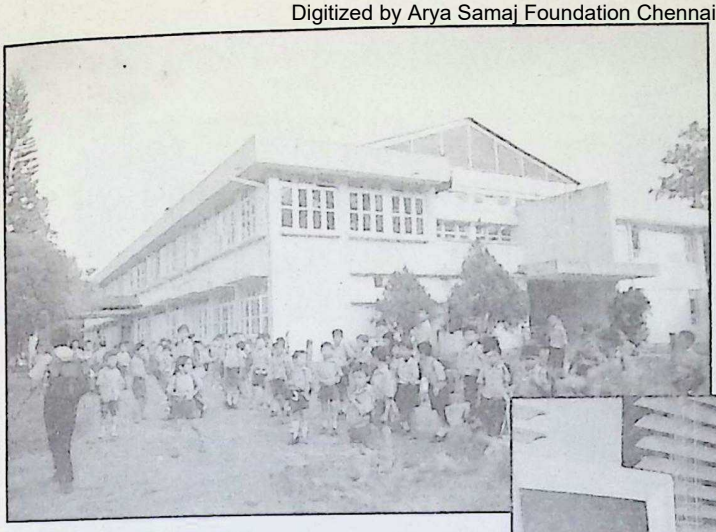
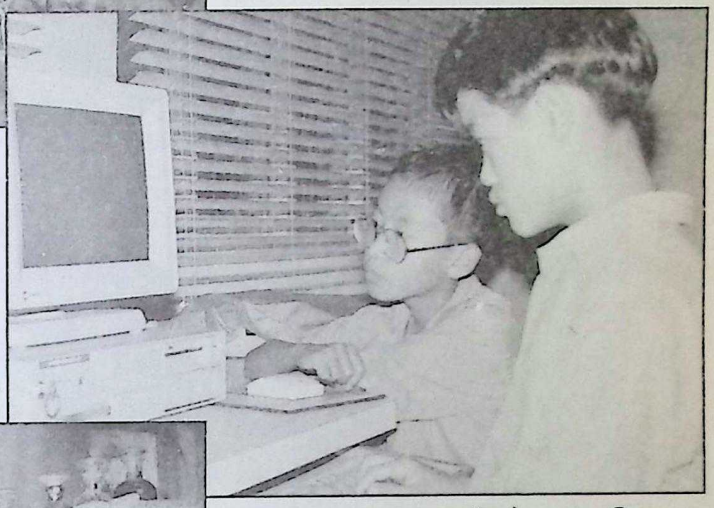
RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
NAROTTAM NAGAR



Students' Hostel — A View



Students at a Computer

Titration in the Chemistry Laboratory

Relief Work: Lapnan Villege, Dist. Tirap

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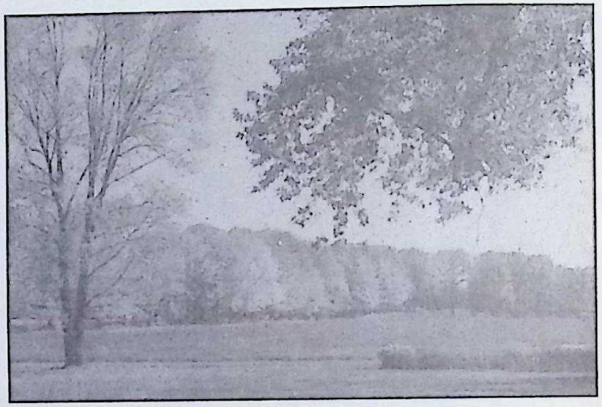
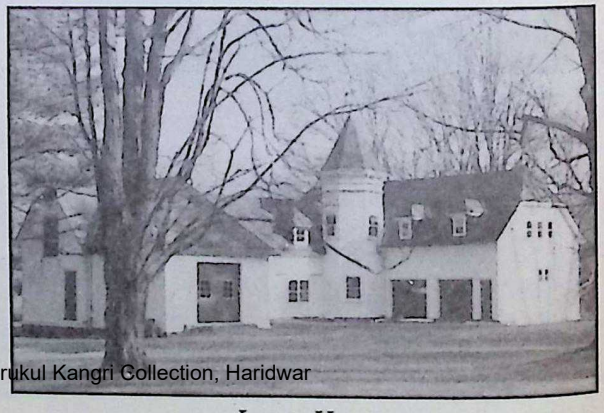
VIVEKANANDA RETREAT RIDGELY

The Manor House in spring



Autumn at Ridgely

MacLeod House



Leggett House

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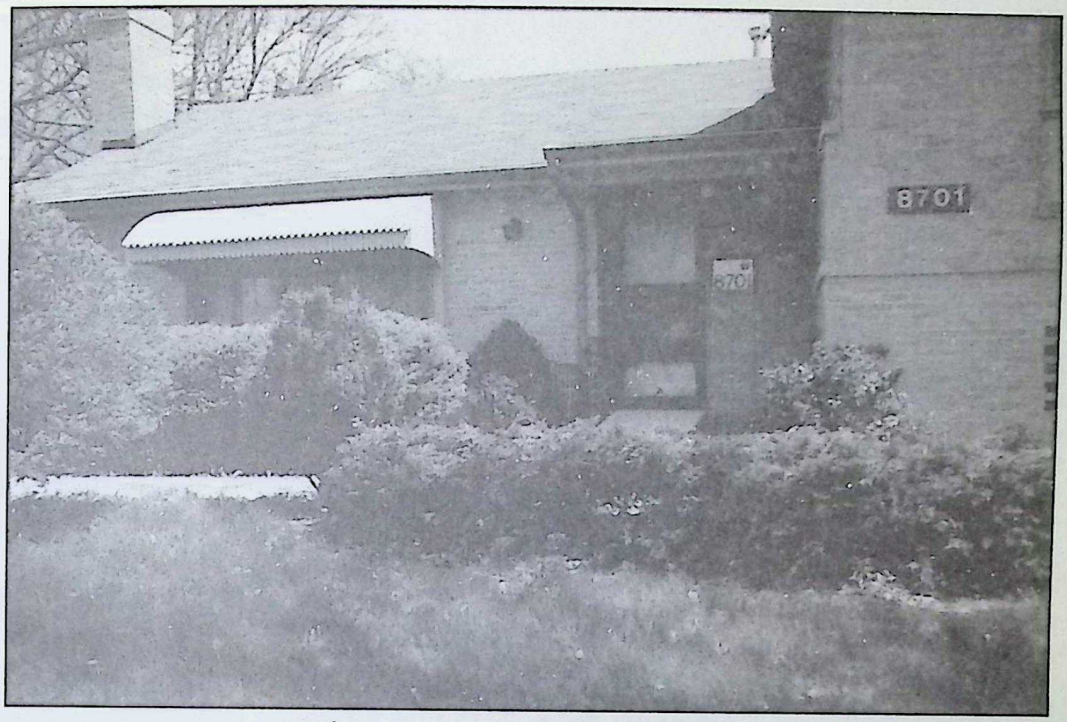
VEDANTA SOCIETY OF KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI



Vedanta Society of Kansas City, Missouri, USA

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Shrine Room at the Vedanta Society of Kansas City

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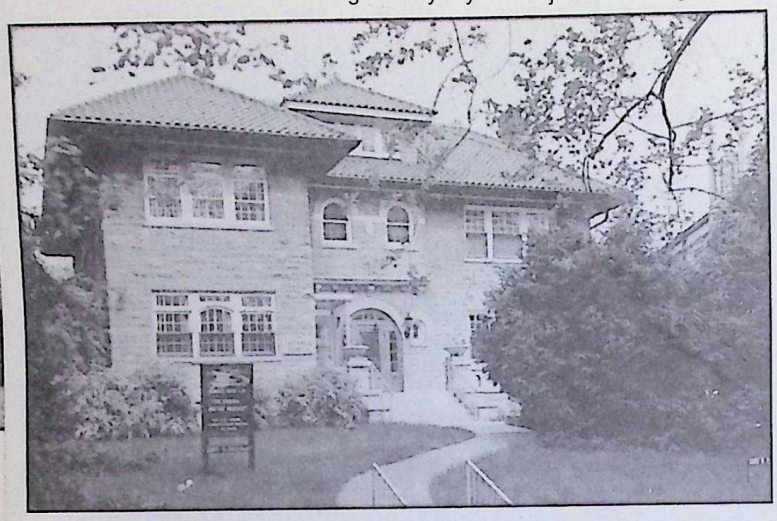
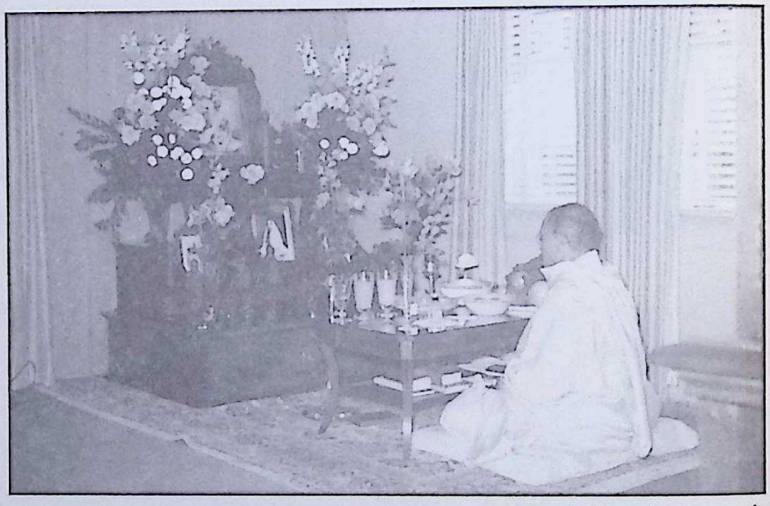
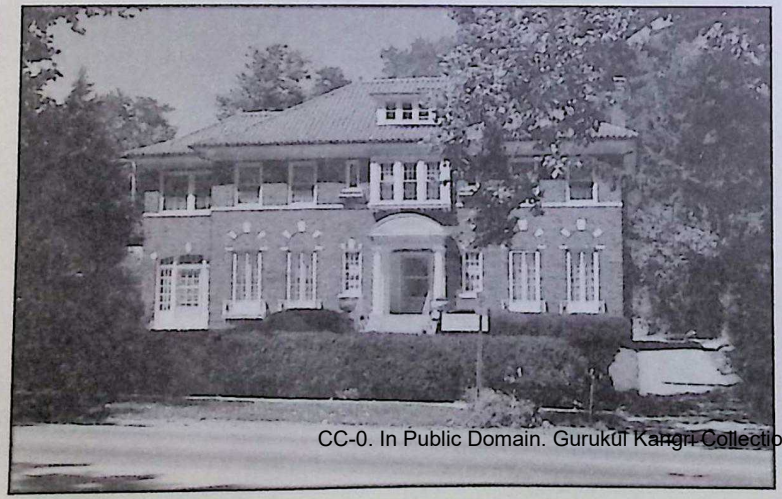


VEDANTA SOCIETY OF ST. LOUIS

Vedanta Society of St. Louis
205 S. Skinker Blvd.



Swami Satprakashananda
in the Shrine



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Vedanta Society of St. Louis Annex
211 Skinker Blvd. (Purchased 1994)

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month there is a program of chanting and reading from the Upanishads.

Swami Chetanananda continues to visit Kansas City about eight times a year, usually arriving on Friday morning and returning to St. Louis early Saturday evening.

In 1993 and in 1995 the Society organized and hosted two large inter-faith symposiums, renting the chapel of the beautiful Unity Temple on the Country Club Plaza for this purpose. At the 1995 program, Dr. Huston Smith was keynote speaker, the theme being 'The Universality of Mysticism in World Religions'. There were 270 in the audience.

Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order who visited the Vedanta Society of Kansas City in the 1980s and early 1990s were: Swamis Adiswarananda, Aparananda, Atmarupananda, Bhaskarananda, Ganeshananda, Prabuddhananda, Pramathananda, Ranganathananda, Sarvadevananda, Sarvagatananda, Sarvatmananda, Shantarupananda, and Swahananda.

The Society's library now has over one thousand volumes, including bound volumes of *Prabuddha Bharata* and *Vedanta Kesari* going back to 1940, a complete thirty-volume bound set of *Vedanta and the West*, and many fine historical books. The Society's audiotape lending library holds over 1500 tapes including lectures given by Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order as well as a complete set of all of Swami Chetanananda's classes given at the Vedanta Society of St Louis.

The Society bookshop stocks standard Vedanta literature, incense, and other devotional items, photographs, and metalphotos. The metalphotos have been produced by the Society since 1976.

Golden Jubilee

In 1997 the Society observed the Fiftieth Anniversary of its founding. Swami Chetanananda visited the Society seven times during the year, and the following six guest Swamis also conducted programs there: Swamis Atmarupananda, Bhaskarananda, Chidananda, Prabuddhananda, Swahananda, and Tathagatananda.

In honor of its Fiftieth Anniversary, thirteen Vedanta devotees also researched and presented a monthly series of talks on second generation monks of the Ramakrishna Order whose primary work was done in the United States. The series was called 'Profiles of Spiritual Pioneers in America,' and the monks profiled were: Swamis Akhilananda, Aseshananda, Ashokananda, Bhashyananda, Bodhananda, Gnaneswarananda, Nikhilananda, Paramananda, Pavitrananda, Prabhavananda, Sarvagatananda, Satprakashananda, Shraddhananda, Swahananda, Vishwananda, and Vividishananda.

The culminating activity of the year's observance was an inter-faith symposium, held at a large auditorium, featuring Dr. Smith as keynote speaker. The theme was 'Religion in the Twenty-First Century'. The other speakers were: Father Seraphim (Eastern Orthodox Gnostic Christianity); Red Squirrel/Nora Foutes (Native American); Dr. Abdulbaki Agbas (Islam); and Swami Chetanananda. The program was attended by 230 people.

Visit by Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj

On 19 and 20 June 1998, Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji, a Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order, visited the Vedanta Society of Kansas City. He and Swamis Chetanananda and Vimalatmananda had flown to Kansas City from St. Louis. That evening the Swami met with Society members and gave some of his reminiscences of Swamis Abhedananda, Akhandananda, Vijnanananda and Virajananda. The next morning a public program began with Vedic chanting by members of the Society. Swami Atmasthanandaji then spoke to a capacity audience on 'The Joy of God-Realization'. After a luncheon, the Swamis returned to St. Louis. *It was a joyful event, marking the beginning of the Society's next fifty years.*

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Looking Back

Since the Vedanta Society of Kansas City has never had a resident Swami, the question naturally arises as to how such a small group in an ordinary Midwestern city has held on for so long. One devotee, a member since 1972, has provided the following opinion:

> Really and truly, what held the Society together and kept it going through the first thirty years or so was the example of sincere love and devotion for Vedanta and for their spiritual teacher (Swami Satprakashananda) that was observed in the lives of the senior, founding members. Their faithful following of his every guideline for the running of the Society was remarkable. Their lives, which were based in spiritual disciplines, were inspiring models for newcomers. Those newcomers who later became active members observed the day-in and day-out steady devotion and loving service given by these people.
>
> For thirty years Carol Condon carried out the duties of secretary, librarian, and bookshop in-charge; Eugene Condon served as President of the Board; Ula Bergfeldt and Gladys Miller opened their homes to the Society for its activities; and Ula Bergfeldt invited many Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order to Kansas City, hosting most of them in her home.
>
> Devotees witnessed the unselfish service these senior devotees gave. Their inner lives were reflected in their unflagging service. They never missed any Society program. Younger devotees understood that Vedanta was at the very center of their lives, and this made them want to bring some of that into their own lives.
>
> Of note is the fact that not one of those senior members feared death. They all faced it cheerfully. Their lives seemed to be truly established in communion with God, and they were known to practice meditation right up to the time of their deaths. The results of that communion shone on their joyful faces, and in their cheerful, untiring service.
>
> Also of note is the fact that all were very ordinary people. This gave hope to younger ones coming to Vedanta that they too could have meaningful, fulfilling lives.
>
> Now it is only the memory of those founding members that we have, and more and more we realize how patiently and calmly they worked to hold this little Society together. Just remembering their unflagging zeal and *tapas* gives us renewed energy and dedication, and we realize that we too are here to build something for those who will come in the future.

In recent decades, the growth of the Vedanta Society of Kansas City has been slow but steady. Improvement of the Society's building is planned. This will increase seating and otherwise improve its general habitability. And so the Master's work continues to spread. ❐

Take the Upanishad as the bow, the great weapon, and place upon it the arrow sharpened by meditation. Then, having drawn it back with a mind directed to the thought of Brahman, strike that mark, O my good friend—that which is the Imperishable.

Om is the bow; the atman is the arrow; Brahman is said to be the mark. It is to be struck by an undistracted mind. Then the atman becomes one with Brahman, as the arrow with the target.

—*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, II.2.3-4

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A Short History of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis (1938 to 1996)

This well-prepared report, meant for inclusion in a proposed book on the history of Vedanta in America, was coomunicated to us by Swami Sarveshanandaji Maharaj of Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago, Illinois, USA, for publication in Prabuddha Bharata.

In 1893 Swami Vivekananda represented Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago and subsequently spread the universal message of Vedanta in the United States of America and some countries in Europe. He founded two Vedanta Societies in America: New York in 1894, and San Francisco in 1900. Later, four other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna — Swamis Saradananda, Abhedananda, Turiyananda, and Trigunatitananda — came to America and preached Vedanta. The next generation of monks of the Ramakrishna Order came and founded Vedanta centers in various cities in the United States.

Swami Satprakashananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, founded the Vedanta Society of St. Louis in October 1938. But long before Swami Satprakashananda arrived in St. Louis, other representatives of Vedanta had visited the area. Swami Vivekananda spoke in St. Louis* when he joined the Slayton Lyceum Lecture Bureau for a tour in the Midwest (vide, *Life of Vivekananda* by Romain Rolland). Unfortunately, this visit was not recorded in the local newspaper. On 24 May 1904 Swami Abhedananda came to St. Louis to attend the World's Fair, where he arranged for an exhibition of Vedanta literature. He also gave a lecture at the Webster Groves Society entitled 'Indian Women,' and took a boat trip on the Mississippi River. Swami Paramananda of the Cohasset (Massachusetts) Vedanta Center lectured several times in St. Louis on his way to California. In 1929 Swami Prabhavananda of the Vedanta Society of Southern California spoke in St. Louis to a gathering of about eighty persons. Swami Nikhilananda of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center in New York lectured in St.

* Romain Rolland in his *Life and Gospel of Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979), p. 42, includes St. Louis in the list of cities toured by Swami Vivekananda when he joined the Slayton Lyceum Lecture Bureau, with a footnote from the publisher which says that 'later research shows that he did not visit St. Louis.' The footnote is based on Marie Louise Burke's monumental work *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries* (in six parts) (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama), Part I: 'His Prophetic Mission', 1983, p. 226, where Ms. Burke states, 'a thorough search has been made of the St. Louis newspapers of 1893 and 1894, and no mention has been made of his lectures'. Swami Sarveshananda while communicating this report on 5 December 1997 for publication in *Prabuddha Bharata* writes, 'we can add that still later research by devotees of both this Center and St. Louis, agree: there seems to be no reference other than Rolland's; and he of course was not primarily a historian but an inspired philosopher of history, writing from 3000 miles distance, in French, about a subject on which he had little first-hand information.'

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Louis at least once.

In a roundabout way the Ramakrishna Temple in Belur Math, India, led to the founding of the St. Louis Vedanta Society. In the early 1930s two women devotees of Swami Akhilananda, the Head of the Providence (Rhode Island) Vedanta Society, donated nearly 650,000 rupees for the construction of the Ramakrishna Temple in Belur. The temple was almost completed in 1937; the dedication ceremony was scheduled for 14 January 1938. Swami Akhilananda planned to return to India for an extended visit and to attend the dedication ceremony, so another Swami was needed to carry on the work at Providence while he was away. Swami Satprakashananda, who was Head of the Ramakrishna Mission in New Delhi, was deputed to fill the position. As soon as he received word of the assignment from Headquarters, he packed and went to Belur Math. After visiting some places of pilgrimage, he boarded the steamer *Bremen*, for New York, arriving there on 8 March 1937.

Swami Satprakashananda was born in 1888 and raised in Dhaka (now in Bangladesh), India, of a pious Hindu family. His premonastic name was Harish. His father died when he was young; when he was old enough, he had to look after his mother. Harish was twelve years when Swami Vivekananda visited Dhaka in 1901. He saw Swamiji on three occasions, which he loved to recount to devotees. He first saw Swamiji getting down from a carriage when he arrived at Mohini Mohan Das's house in Dhaka. The next day he saw Swamiji going for a walk with a group of people on the bank of the Budiganga River. Swamiji then left Dhaka for a pilgrimage and returned a few days later. One afternoon Harish heard that Swamiji was staying in a houseboat on a nearby river. He ran to the river and found the houseboat tied to the shore. The boat had windows along both sides, so he was able to see inside quite well. Swamiji was pacing back and forth on an aisle in the boat. After a while he stopped walking and sat on a bench near a window and looked at the boy. Harish felt he had been blessed. This impression remained vivid all through his life, and it strengthened his resolve to become a monk of the Ramakrishna Order.

In January 1908 Harish came to Calcutta and met M., the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. He told M. that there was a plan to establish a Hindu temple, a Muslim mosque, a Christian church, and a Buddhist temple in the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Dhaka, in accordance with Sri Ramakrishna's teaching of the harmony of religions. He enthusiastically told M. that there would be a big signboard at the entrance: 'The Temple of Harmony of Religions.' M. listened quietly, and then said: 'This is what you want — signboard and advertisement — self-advertisement. This is not Sri Ramakrishna's idea. According to the Master one should gather something here within the heart [pointing his finger to his heart] before he launches on public work. First of all you should have devotion to God. Until you have that you are nowhere, you are simply *frittering* away your energies. The Master said, again and again, that one should pray to God in solitude and secrecy *(nirjane, gopane).*' Harish remembered M.'s advice throughout his life.

Harish first visited Belur Math on 6 February 1908, where he met Swamis Brahmananda and Premananda. In 1911 he met Holy Mother and Swami Shivananda. Later, he had an opportunity to come in contact with the other disciples of the Master: Swamis Saradananda, Turiyananda, Abhedananda, Subodhananda, Akhandananda, and Vijnanananda. He published his personal reminiscences of some of the direct disciples in his book *Sri Ramakrishna's Life and Message in the Present Age.*

During his secondary schooling and college days, Harish was involved with the activities of the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Dhaka. Whenever he could, he visited Belur Math and the Swamis; he finally was initiated

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by Swami Brahmananda in 1918. He had a keen desire to become a monk, but Swami Brahmananda asked him to take care of his aged mother because she had no one else. But as time rolled on, his patience sometimes grew thin as he saw other young men, his age and younger, joining the Order. Once he expressed this impatience to Swami Saradananda within earshot of Yogin-ma, an attendant of Holy Mother, who had a sharp tongue on occasion. She retorted, 'Ah, you'd throw the old lady in the Ganges, put on an ochre cloth, and join the Order!' That day there was no more talk of joining the Order.

When Harish's mother passed away in 1924, he lost no time in joining the Ramakrishna Order. He was 36 years old. He had lived the life of strict brahmacharya for many years. He received his sannyasa vows in 1927 from Swami Shivananda and was given the name Swami Satprakashananda. During his days in India, he worked in Dhaka, Varanasi, Advaita Ashrama in Mayavati, and Delhi.

In 1937, when Swami Satprakashananda arrived in New York, he was received by Swamis Bodhananda and Nikhilananda, the Heads of the Vedanta Society and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center. They took him directly to Grand Central Station and put him on a train for Providence, where he would assume Swami Akhilananda's responsibilities as Head of the Center.

Swami Satprakashananda had arrived in the United States carrying a cane, a popular fashion in India. Swami Bodhananda took one look at the cane and said: 'Throw that thing away. People here will think you are an old man.' Swami didn't use the cane until many years later when he was partially crippled by a back operation.

Swami Satprakashananda conducted services at the Providence Center for one year until Swami Akhilananda returned from India in March 1938. Since the Providence Center was rather small, there was no reason for Swami Satprakashananda to remain. Swami Akhilananda suggested that the Swami go to Washington, D.C., the nation's capital, and lecture there with the intention of starting a center. Swami Satprakashananda lectured to a group in Washington, D.C., all that summer, but decided not to start a center for two reasons: the central focus of the city is political, not spiritual, and its population is transient. Swami Satprakashananda would either have to return to India or find another location in the United States. He decided to consult with some of the other Swamis in the United States.

Coincidentally, Swami Prabhavananda invited Swami Satprakashananda and other Swamis to participate in the dedication ceremony of the Hollywood Vedanta Temple. After the ceremony, the Swamis discussed the situation and decided that Swami Satprakashananda should stay in America. 'The work has progressed in the East and West Coasts,' they said, 'but in the center of the country the work has not progressed much. But it will be very difficult there, for the people are not as broadminded as those in the coastal areas.' It was decided that Swami Satprakashananda should start a Vedanta Center in St. Louis, a fairly large city and centrally located.

From Hollywood, Swami Satprakashananda went to San Francisco and was the guest of Swami Ashokananda, the Head of the Vedanta Society of Northern California. Swami Ashokananda told his devotees that Swami Satprakashananda was going to St. Louis to start a center and that names of some persons in that city would be very helpful. Miss Belle Martin, a devotee who had a sister in St. Louis, came forward and 'volunteered' her sister, Mrs. Ann Lee Steinmesch. Swami Satprakashananda wrote to Mrs. Steinmesch, who agreed to meet him at Union Station and help him find a hotel. When he arrived in St. Louis late in the afternoon on 13 October 1938, she greeted him and took him to her home for supper. After that she took him to the Parkview Hotel on the southeast corner of Kingshighway and West Pine Boulevard, facing Forest Park. Swami Satprakashananda

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had only two hundred fifty dollars in his pocket.

The next morning the Swami surveyed the area and decided the hotel was not suitably located. He called his benefactress, told her of his problem, and asked her to take him to Mr. Hilmar Herold, a subscriber of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, the only other contact he had. Mrs. Steinmesch obliged him and they found Mr. Herold high on a ladder, painting his small house.

Mr. Herold was obviously proud of his scriptural knowledge, and he plied the Swami with questions while he was still on the ladder. He appeared to be quite skeptical of the Swami even though the latter quickly answered all his questions. 'Tell me,' Mr. Herold hollered down from the ladder, 'you say you have studied Vedanta, that you are a Vedanta Swami. Can you explain to me the meaning of this verse: "The good is one thing; the pleasant, another. Both of these, serving different needs, bind a man. It goes well with him who, of the two, takes the good; but he who chooses the pleasant misses the end"' (*Katha Upanishad*, 1.2.1). The Swami immediately recited the same quotation in Sanskrit, then said, 'Yes, I can explain it.' Mr. Herold came down from his perch on the ladder and exclaimed, 'Then you are one in a million.' The Swami said emphatically but with humor, 'I am!'

Mr. Herold was acquainted with a woman who had heard Swamis Prabhavananda and Paramananda lecture years before. When he told her the situation, she made a list of eight hundred persons. The list was taken to the Swami in his hotel by a young man. The Swami said later that as soon as he saw this young man he knew that this would be the person who would help him find another place to live and to lecture.

Swami Satprakashananda finally settled on the Melbourne Hotel at Grand Avenue and Lindell Boulevard. It was centrally located and had a large lecture hall. A flier was printed and mailed to every person on the list supplied by Mr. Herold's friend. His first lecture, given on 23 October 1938, drew a large crowd as did his subsequent lectures. He soon moved his residence to a nearby apartment, but continued to give lectures at the Melbourne Hotel until 1941. During World War II the crowds diminished. 'But,' the Swami said years later, 'I never lacked for these two things: flowers for the altar and food for the stomach.' In the beginning his attempts to advertise his lectures in the local newspapers were disappointing. Several newspapers immediately said, 'No, we cannot take your advertisement. We do not believe in Swamis — they want money — we do not care for these things.' Beginning in the early forties, however, short announcements or notices were printed in the papers. But in the mid-forties, when the Swami began holding all Sunday lectures and classes in his apartment, the newspapers again would not accept his announcements.

Swami Satprakashananda was about fifty years old when he came to St. Louis. He seldom moved slowly, but rather bounced around. Mr. Oldendorph, an early member, recalled the Swami: 'I had invited the Swami to dinner at my house, and while we were waiting for my wife to serve it, I put up a badminton net in the backyard. I figured a little light exercise would sharpen our appetites. Well, it was anything but a little light exercise as far as I was concerned. This lithe Hindu saint proved to be a regular champion, and I was hopelessly outclassed by his serve, agility, and attack. He could leap and pounce and hit that shuttlecock all over the territory. He was indeed so superior and I was so completely exhausted, I had to quit.'

Times were not easy for the Swami and the Vedanta Society during the early 1940s. The Swami moved into an apartment with a living room big enough to accommodate the customary small gatherings. Shortly thereafter he began to receive taunting phone calls at all hours of the day and night. Many people who did not know the Swami perhaps saw

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him as a fortune teller out to take their money. One student admitted that he had 'come to scoff and remained to pray.' The annoying phone calls and occasional crank letters stopped when the police were informed.

St. Louis was ultraconservative and predominately Catholic and Lutheran. Once, when the Swami asked a Catholic priest about his attitude toward other religions, he received the answer, 'The sooner they die, the better.' That attitude has largely disappeared now, of course, but in the 1940s it added considerably to the difficulty in starting a permanent Vedanta center. There is usually a humorous side to every serious endeavour. Mr. X., an oil financier, became devoted to the Swami and volunteered to take him to various places. One day Mr. X. blurted forth, 'Swami, you are a saint. I love you.' 'Well, Mr. X.,' the Swami answered gently, 'If you think that I am a saint, can't you help me build my Vedanta work?' 'Oh no, Swami,' was his reply. 'I am an Episcopalian — I can't help you.' Swami humorously remarked, 'I didn't know that an Episcopalian couldn't help a saint!'

Another evening the same gentleman invited Swami Satprakashananda to his house to attend a party. The Swami agreed to go, reluctantly, after thinking that he might meet some people who would be interested in Vedanta. The guests all gathered around and asked him many questions pertaining to yoga, meditation, and so on, but some of the questions were inane. One socially prominent matron asked, 'Swami, if all men became monks like yourself, what would happen to our population?' The Swami told her, 'There is no more possibility of that happening than all men becoming doctors or lawyers.'

After the war ended in 1945, more people began attending the classes. The Swami realized that for the Vedanta work to expand a permanent home would be necessary. In 1950 a legal matter came up that required the reorganization of the Society (or 'Center' as it was called then). The Vedanta Center of St. Louis had originally been organized as a corporation under a Board of Trustees, which had the power to control the temporal affairs of the organization even if the Swami-in-Charge disagreed with them. This was hardly satisfactory to Swami Satprakashananda, who had founded an organization that was for teaching and training its members in the spiritual way of life. The Society was reorganized as an unincorporated religious association under the Swami-in-Charge. The new by-laws stated that the temporal affairs of the Society would be managed by the Board of Trustees, but the Swami-in-Charge would 'have such power and control over the temporal affairs of the Society as will enable him to effectively discharge his responsibility of maintaining and furthering its spiritual purpose.' Thus the Society was reorganized because Swami Satprakashananda knew that its secular members might not always understand the actions of the Swami-in-Charge, and this could jeopardize the spiritual goals of the Society.

On 27 March 1946 Swami Satprakashananda visited Kansas City, Missouri, at the invitation of Gladys Miller and Ula Bergfeldt. He gave a talk at the Bellerive Hotel entitled *India's Spiritual Message.* The Swami saw potential for growth in Kansas City, an important Midwestern city two hundred fifty miles west of St. Louis. The next time he visited Kansas City, in September 1947, Swami Satprakashananda advised the devotees to hold meetings fortnightly in someone's home, for meditation, prayer, and reading. Several years later, audio tape recordings of the Swami's classes and lectures given in St. Louis were used at these meetings.

In late 1951, Swami Satprakashananda fell and ruptured a disc in his spine. On 13 March 1952, Dr. Rolland Klemme, an internationally known neurosurgeon in St. Louis, performed surgery, but it was not completely successful: While administering the spinal anesthetic he struck a nerve, leaving Swami Satprakashananda paralyzed from waist down. The doctors thought he would never

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walk again, but by sheer determination the Swami got out of his hospital bed and was soon walking with the aid of the cane he had brought from India. The surgeon advised him to walk barefooted on the sand to help bring back sensation in his legs. Swami Akhilananda invited him to Marshfield, Massachusetts, which is close to the Atlantic coast. Swami Satprakashananda went there and followed his surgeon's advice. Some summers he went also to Laguna Beach, California, as a guest of Swami Prabhavananda, and walked on the sand. For the rest of his life he walked with a pronounced limp, but he didn't use his cane again for twenty years.

Swami Satprakashananda convinced the members of the Society that the Vedanta work would not expand without a permanent home. In June 1952, a suitable house at 205 South Skinker Boulevard (west of Forest Park) was found and purchased, although not without some difficulty. Previously, the Society had attempted to purchase a different property in the same area. But the Society could not buy the house because of racial prejudice: The owner refused to sell when he found that a 'foreign' religion was behind it, and an Indian was going to live there. To avoid repeating this unfortunate situation, the house of Mr. and Mrs. John Gallagher was bought in the name of Dr. Huston Smith, a well-known professor of world religions at Washington University and the president of the Society. In real estate terms, Dr. Smith became the 'straw party.' He transferred the title of the property to the Society on 19 September 1952. Swami Satprakashananda moved into the Vedanta home on 29 September.

With new enthusiasm the Swami continued lecturing regularly. During the more than forty years he worked in the United States as a spiritual teacher, he visited India only once, from 3 August 1955 to 28 November 1955. While in India the Swami met an expert carpenter, who built and hand-carved a lovely mahogany altar and thrones for the St. Louis shrine and chapel.

The Center continued to expand, and the chapel, which seated about fifty-five persons, was too small. In 1967 work began on an extension to the chapel, and the addition of two bedrooms and a bath on the second floor. This work was completed in 1968. The dedication of the new chapel took place on 4 October 1968 with an elaborate ceremony performed by Swamis Ranganathananda, Shraddhananda, and Bhashyananda.

Swami Satprakashananda was a well-known Sanskrit scholar, and before coming to the West worked as an associate editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata*. In between giving lectures and classes and managing other activities of the Center, the Swami wrote some precious books on the Vedanta tradition: *Methods of Knowledge: According to Advaita Vedanta; The Goal and the Way: The Vedantic Approach to Life's Problems; The Universe, God, and God-Realization; Meditation: Its Process, Practice, and Culmination; Hinduism and Christianity; Sri Ramakrishna's Life and Message in the Present Age; Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to the Present Age; Ethics and Religion; The Use of Symbols in Religion;* and *World Peace — How?* In the later part of the 1950s Virginia Ward began tape-recording Swami Satprakashananda's lectures and classes; these have become a valuable asset to the Society.

In the early 1970s, the Swami's health began to fail, and he found that lecturing every Sunday and holding weekly classes was too difficult for him. The Society began to use his tape-recorded lectures often. Swami Satprakashananda wrote to the authorities in Belur Math and requested an assistant. Swami Yuktananda was sent in November 1974; he worked for a few months, but was more interested in social activities than in preaching Vedanta. He returned to India in May 1975.

Swami Satprakashananda was ninety years old, and bedridden. He had taught Vedanta in St. Louis for forty-one years. At his request Belur Math transferred Swami

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Chetanananda from Hollywood, California, to St. Louis on 1 March 1978. Swami Chetanananda had assisted Swami Prabhavananda and worked as an Assistant Minister of the Vedanta Society of Southern California from June 1971 to February 1978. After his arrival, Swami Satprakashananda told Swami Chetanananda: 'Here is the key to the relics, please take care of the Master; and there is the chapel downstairs, please tell the devotees about Vedanta.' Swami Chetanananda thereafter took responsibility for all the lectures and classes, and oversaw the running of the Society.

On 15 November 1979 Swami Satprakashananda passed away. His life had been one of dedication to the ideal of Vedanta and of service to everyone who wanted to reach the 'Goal Supreme.' In honor of the Swami, at 6 p.m. on 1 December 1979, a Religious Conference was held in the chapel. Dr. Huston Smith a long-time friend and admirer of the Swami, chaired the conference. Seven religious leaders, representing different faiths, participated. The following day a memorial service was held in the Society's chapel: Nine Head Swamis from different American centers were present, as well as Dr. Huston Smith. Shortly after the Swami's passing away, Swami Chetanananda was named the Head of the Society by Belur Math.

Swami Chetanananda followed the traditions begun by his predecessor, and added the following: Vivekananda Festival on the 4th of July, Krishna Festival, elaborate worship services during Durga Puja, Holy Mother's birthday, and Ramakrishna's birthday, and several vigils during the year. From 1980 he began making regular visits to the Vedanta Society of Kansas City, which had been started by Swami Satprakashananda in 1947. In 1985 the society purchased a permanent home, where Swami Chetanananda now lectures and conducts retreats several times a year.

Apart from giving lectures and classes in St. Louis and Kansas City, Swami Chetanananda produced significant books and tapes. His books in English include: *A Guide to Spiritual Life; Avadhuta Gita: Meditation and Its Methods: Ramakrishna as We Saw Him: Ramakrishna: A Biography in Pictures: Spiritual Treasures: Letters of Swami Turiyananda: Swami Adbhutananda: Teachings and Reminiscences: They Lived with God: God Lived with Them: Vedanta: Voice of Freedom:* and *Vivekananda: East Meets West.* His Bengali publications include: *Sri Ramakrishner Sannidhye; Matri Darshan; Kalpataru Sri Ramakrishna; Srima Samipe; and Vedanter Aloke Christer Sailopadesh.* His audio tapes are: *Echoes of the Eternal: Peace, Bliss,* and *Harmony* (three tapes), and *Breath of the Eternal: Awakening, Reflection,* and *Illumination* (three tapes). His video tapes include: *Ramakrishna (A Documentary); Vivekananda as We Saw Him (A Documentary);* and *Parables of Ramakrishna.*

The Society's publication department is quite active. Several books written by Swami Satprakashananda and Swami Chetanananda have been translated into other languages. During 1988 the Society observed its Golden Jubilee, and in 1993 it held special celebratory events to mark the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's coming to the West. Many visiting Swamis and distinguished speakers lectured during these events and their talks were video-taped. Since December 1984 all Sunday lectures by Swami Chetanananda have been video-taped. In December 1994 the Society purchased the adjacent property at 211 South Skinker Boulevard, formerly the 'I am Temple'; this was an important landmark for the continuing growth of the Society.

Since 1938 every member and friend of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis has contributed something meaningful to its growth. Although many of their names are not recorded in this history, their love and dedication for the Vedanta movement will be remembered all through the ages. ❐

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Reviews and Notices

HINDUISM: THE ETERNAL TRADITION (SANATANA DHARMA); David Frawley (Vamadeva Sastri); publ. Voice of India, 2/18 Ansari Road, New Delhi 110 002; 1995; pp. 261; Price Rs. 100/-.

'After a study of some forty years and more of the great religions of the world, I find none so perfect, none so scientific, none so philosophical, and none so spiritual as the great religion known by the name of Hinduism. The more you know it, the more you will love it; the more you try to understand it, the more deeply you value it. Make no mistake; without Hinduism India has no future.... If India's own children do not cling to her faith, who shall guard it?' So wrote Mrs. Annie Besant, the Irish woman who founded the Theosophical Society and Home Rule League and presided over the session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta in 1917.

The early Western perceptions of Hinduism were, however, different — ranging from a description of it as 'pure paganism' (viz. in Abbe Dubois' writings) to its denunciation as barbarous and horrendous in nature (viz. in William Brunton and Pierre Martin's works). When Ziegenbalg expatiated on Hindu ideas, customs and ceremonies, he was told by his Protestant patrons not to while away 'his time with studying pagan nonsense'. The Evangelists spread the word that the Hindus were a 'fiendish race' who committed heinous acts in the name of religion. Some Jesuits argued that the religious ideas of the Hindus were derivative in nature. But this view could not hold ground for long. Holwell, an 18th century British Indologist, for example, contended that the mythology as well as the cosmogony of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans had been derived from the doctrines of the Hindus, and that the religious beliefs of ancient Europeans were based upon the later perversions of Hinduism.

Although the researches of Sir William Jones, Charles Wilkins and others proved that Hinduism was neither derivative nor a bundle of fables and superstitions, the tirade of Evangelicals and Utilitarians against the ancient religion of India continued unabated. Yet the inquisitive scholars found in Hinduism a qualitative system of ethics and a monotheistic base. While delivering a course of seven lectures to the ICS candidates at the Cambridge University in 1882, Professor Max Müller observed that the Aryas of India were 'the framers of the most wonderful language, the Sanskrit ... the fathers of the most natural of natural religions, the makers of the most transparent of mythologies, the inventors of the most subtle philosophy and the givers of the most elaborate laws.'

After the conclusion of the first Worlds' Parliament of Religions in which Hinduism was ably represented by Prof. Chakravarti, Narasimhachari, Lakshmi Narain and Swami Vivekananda among others, Merwin Marie Snell (President of the Scientific Section of the Assembly) unequivocally stated that there was very little of profound thought and aspiration in Christendom which could not be traced to one or another of the successive influxes of Hindu ideas — either to the Hinduised Hellenism of Pythagoras and Plato, to the Hinduised Mazdaism of the Gnostics, to the Hinduised Judaism of the Kabbalists, to the Hinduised 'Mahommedanism of Moorish philosophers', the Hinduised occultism of the Theosophists, the Hinduised socialism of the New England Transcendentalists and 'the many other new streams of orientalising influence which are fertilizing the soil of contemporary Christendom'.

Such being the antiquity and the richness of Hindu tradition, it is strange that it is still being distorted and misinterpreted. David Frawley, Director of the American Institute of Vedic Studies, intends to set the record straight in this book by distinguishing between the quintessence of Hinduism and how it is understood in the modern world.

The book delineates the perennial wisdom of *Sanatana Dharma* (in common parlance, Hinduism) taking up in its gamut such aspects as the world view of Hinduism, its development through the ages, its peculiarities vis-a-vis other religions, its philosophy and ethics, its perceptions on reincarnation, medicine, astrology and the occult, the *raison d'etre* of idolatry and rituals and the future of Hinduism. Besides, it attempts to answer some common questions about Hinduism.

David Frawley regrets that a Hindu is painted in the West as 'a particular ethnic type born in India' who believes in caste and untouchability and who is socially, economically and culturally backward. The truth, however, is that he belongs to an eternal tradition which upholds truth and righteousness, which is rooted in *ṛta* and *dharma*, which does not confine itself to one prophet or messiah, one holy book or one Church, which is evergrowing and evergreen. This holy tradition is not limited to a particular spiritual path, name, form, person or group as in the case of other religions. Rather it accepts all spiritual paths as leading to the same goal. It believes that each human soul

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is free to choose its course and move in accordance with its natural proclivities. The eternal tradition of *Sanatana Dharma* holds that Truth is beyond limitation; it cannot be monopolized by anyone as it is a matter of direct experience.

Hinduism has been regarded as 'the richest cluster on the variegated tree of human religion'. The Jesuit scholars who made a reappraisal of Hinduism in the 1960s observed that 'the whole of mankind can be proud that in India the human quest for truth has been so diversified and unrelenting.... Plurality and tolerance appear rather as the true ornament of Hinduism'. Corroborating the assessment, Frawley asserts that Hinduism contains the greatest diversity and freedom in the spiritual life that can be found in any of the religions on the planet. The Divine can be adored in any name or form or beyond form. God can be seen as father, mother, brother, sister, friend, or master; in everything that exists, and in one's own self.

Frawley rejects the colonialist and the missionary view of Hinduism as primitive, barbaric, polytheist, immoral, or oppressive. It is not 'an ethnic belief system' which started in a particular age, but goes back to beginningless time. It is not only the oldest of all the religions but also the newest; the reason being that it has been recast by living sages during the course of history. The Western mind has tried 'to reduce religion to a particular name and form'. 'It has tried to compartmentalize Hinduism as a religion the way Christianity and Islam appear to be seeking to find in all religions a particularized belief system.'

Frawley regards the word 'Hinduism' as a 'misnomer' and 'a foreign invention' since it is not mentioned in any of the classical texts. It is rather a geographical expression as it identifies 'the region from which Western cultures have contacted it'. *Sanatana Dharma* or the universal tradition, Hinduism does not need to represent itself as 'one religious identity as opposed to others'.

Religious exclusivism and the infallibility syndrome in the matter of beliefs about the sacred have generated acerbity and led to tensions and conflicts. In this context, Frawley raises a number of questions which have clear answers. Why should God have only one son? Why should there be only one messiah for all times to come? Why should there be only one religious book when any number of such books are possible? Why should God be addressed only in the masculine sense when he is beyond gender? Can conversion bring about an overnight change in a person's psyche? And so on.

Frawley presents Hinduism as 'a multidimensional tradition that no form or linear thinking, whether scientific or theological, can grasp'. It is 'a vibrant ocean of spiritual, religious and occult insights and practices woven into a vast culture. It has the complexity of life itself which cannot be reduced to a formula, understood in a single book or controlled by any church or organization'.

The charge of idolatry has been a convenient stick to beat Hinduism with, all through history. Christianity, Judaism and Islam dub idolatry as evil and hence sinful. It is said to be indicative of a lower degree of intelligence or civilization. Swami Vivekananda was the first Indian to argue at the Chicago Parliament of Religions that image worship was not to be derided as it helped one to meditate on the Supreme. He also referred to the deeper psychological implications of iconolatria by observing: 'We can no more think about anything without a material image than we can live without breathing. And by the law of association, the material image calls up the mental idea and vice versa.'

Frawley's justification of idolatry rests primarily on two factors — the universality of this practice in almost all religious traditions including the Buddhist, the Taoist, the Catholic Shinto, Greek Orthodox, Native American, African and Asian, and the utility of image worship in helping a devotee to approach the invisible and transcendental reality by way of supreme devotion.

Frawley contends that Protestant Christians and Muslims who are opposed to idolatry practise it nevertheless. Many Protestants have a picture of Christ or at least they wear a cross which is obviously 'a usage of images and symbols'. Muslims pray only in the direction of Mecca which limits the Divine to a particular place. Many Muslims pray at the tombs of their saints, have pictures of their religious or political leaders, circumambulate the *Kaaba* seven times (anti-clockwise) and kiss the black stone each time they pass it. This regards, Frawley, as a worship of objects. 'The idolatry of the word, idea, name, or book is perhaps the worst form of all idolatries,' he says.

Frawley ruefully maintains that the charge of idolatry against Hinduism is often levelled 'as part of a campaign of conversion, invasion and conquest'. It has been used as an alibi 'for smashing statues, robbing and demolishing temples, for plunder and genocide, all conveniently done in the name of God'. The irony of the matter is that different parameters are employed when religious images are judged. They are called icons and classified as works of art when they are a part of the Christian tradition. But they are dubbed as idols born of primitive beliefs when they are part of non-Christian traditions. 'An image of Krishna as the good cowherd is on par with that of Christ as the good shepherd.... To make one into a superstitious idol and the other into a sacred image is hypocritical and intolerant'.

Frawley regards the use of images as an artistic approach to the Divine. Images are 'the great ar-

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chetypes of life, the embodiment in form of the great truths of the Eternal'. Those who condemn their use betray their ignorance of symbolic language. Hinduism regards all forms of art — music, dance, poetry, sculpture, painting, architecture, etc. as different languages which can be fruitfully employed in the worship of God.

Frawley's answers to questions about Hinduism are noteworthy for their profundity and succinctness. They cover a wide range of themes from God, non-duality, atheism, the Divine Mother, the origin of *Sanatana Dharma*, and the importance of scriptures to evolution, Karma, *prārabdha*, evil, heaven and hell; from Yoga, Vedanta, meditation, self-inquiry, self-surrender and service to Tantra, mantra, Ayurveda, astrology and the esoteric importance of temples. It also brings into focus the Hindu view of theology, ecology, economics, proselytization and religious fundamentalism. Such questions as should Hindus be more aggressive or become missionaries; how can Hindus function as minorities in Islamic countries, or why did the Pope condemn yogic practices, have also been brilliantly answered.

David Frawley deserves thanks for so eloquently putting forth the quintessentials of Hinduism and for lambasting the detractors of the eternal Indian tradition (*Sanatana Dharma*). Written in a simple, lucid style, it should be a compulsory reading for students, scholars and common people.

Dr. Satish K. Kapoor, Jalandhar City

ARISE ARJUNA: HINDUISM AND THE MODERN WORLD; David Frawley (Vamadeva Shastri); Voice of India, 2/18 Ansari Road, New Delhi 110 002; 1995; pp. 228; Rs. 100/-.

This book is an exhortation to the complacent, ignorant and misguided Hindus who are unaware or unconscious of their rich cultural heritage; who, in utter pusillanimity, bear continuous assaults on their religion without making any protest; who don't realize that any compromise with falsehood is not tolerance but self-destruction, and who lack the moral will to guide humanity onto a religious path.

It is at the same time an interpretation and an exposition of Hinduism in a modern context. It is divided into four units which separately discuss social, religious, historical and cultural issues in a scholarly manner.

David Frawley finds Hinduism in crisis. He regrets that while Hinduism is the most liberal, universal, syncretic and diverse of all the world's main religions, westernized Hindus take pride in ridiculing it. Ironically, they paint Hinduism as 'fundamentalist and dangerous' and hold a respectful view of Christianity and Islam. They follow the colonial or the Marxist-socialist model 'with its atheistic and anti-nationalistic orientation' to interpret Indian history and culture. Frawley ruefully writes: 'I was appalled at how little so many Hindus either valued or understood their own tradition. They would equate Hindu spirituality with a superstition on par with caste and untouchability. They were fond of quoting Marx or Shakespeare but would certainly not mention the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which they regard as regressive. They used materialists and atheists like Freud and Marx to interpret the Vedas, if they studied the Vedas at all. While I was interested in visiting temples and ashrams in India, they wanted to talk about the latest developments in western technology. While I was a vegetarian, they ate meat. While I admired the sculpture in Hindu temples, they preferred modern Western art. While I liked Indian classical music, they liked Western classical music or even rock and roll, if they were younger in age.'

Frawley holds that the Western news media and the English language press in India are biased against the Hindus and often dub them as chauvinist, fascist or illiberal. Although some Hindu groups could be called fanatic, backward or superstitious they were not representative of Hindus as such. In fact, their number was infinitesimal. It may even be argued that the so-called bigots among Hindus 'have a far more liberal view of religion than orthodox or even liberal Christians and Muslims'.

Alluding to the misrepresentations of Hinduism in the press, David Frawley observes that 'one Hindu demolition of a disputed mosque is more newsworthy and an expression of greater intolerance than Islamic destruction of any number of Hindu temples.' Even the Muslim destruction of Ahamadiya mosques is not regarded as a newsworthy item in the Western press. Strangely enough, Saudi Arabia which is 'an intolerant fundamentalist state', where all religions are illegal except Islam, and which provides financial aid to fundamentalist and terrorist groups is described as a 'moderate' Islamic country because of its rich oil resources. 'Economic need fashions the global press and structures global ethics,' he says.

In spite of the brutal massacre at Tienanmen, the China continues to hold 'the most favoured nation trading status'. The Western media seldom highlights human rights violation in China. Although the country sells weapons of mass destruction, treats religious communities with disdain and suppresses the right to freedom of Tibetans, one seldom finds anti-Chinese attitude in the Western press. Hindu minority in Pakistan, Bangladesh and other Muslim countries has been mal-

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treated, even eliminated, but this aspect has seldom made headlines. Hindus working in Arabic countries cannot practise their religion in public 'and yet no country, including India, protests this'. On the other hand, non-Hindus working in India have no such restrictions. 'Clearly India has not stifled Islam the way Pakistan and Bangladesh have stifled Hinduism,' he argues.

Regrettably, the Western news media focusses on caste, dowry deaths, etc. ignoring the better side of the world's oldest religion. What if the American culture was presented through drug addiction, promiscuity, violence, broken homes with complete disregard of the higher values of life it embodies?

Frawley rejects the concept of 'Hindu Fundamentalism' by posing a number of questions. Fundamentalist groups are often involved in proselytising activities to bring everyone to their viewpoint. What missionary activities are Hindu fundamentalists promoting throughout the world? What missions abroad have Hindu fundamentalist set-up to convert Christians, Muslims or those of other belief-systems to the only true religion called Hinduism? What Hindus are motivated by a missionary spirit to discredit people of other religions in order to convert and save them? he asks. Perhaps none. And again: Have Hindu preachers or god-men ever condemned non-Hindus to eternal damnation or issued *fatwas* asking for the death of anyone merely for criticising Hindu beliefs? Although there are hypercritical works on Hinduism, how many of such books are Hindu fundamentalists trying to ban, and how many of their authors are they intimidating? The answers are in the negative again.

Fundamentalism has affinity with militant or terroristic activities which are aimed at creating anarchy in the rival camp or capturing political power. Frawley asks again: What Hindu minorities in the world are violently agitating for their separate state? What planes have Hindu fundamentalists hijacked, what hostages have they taken, what bombs have they planted? What Hindu fundamentalist leader can match the intolerance of an Ayatollah Khomeini? The answers are obvious.

What has come to be dubbed as 'Hindu fundamentalism' is, in fact, 'a reaction to Islamic, Christian and communist fundamentalism which are all organised, according to an exclusive belief-system and a strategy to take over the world'. Ironically, the Indian Muslims have their own Muslim party but none calls them fundamentalists. On the other hand, the political organisation of Hindus always comes under attack. 'Why should not Hindus have a political voice even in India?' he asks. Those who are fearful of a militant Hindu theocratic rule should ask: Does Rama or Krishna provide such a model? What Hindu theocratic state has ever existed through the course of history?

Frawley blasts leftist scholarship in India which portrays Hinduism not as a comprehensive, continuing tradition going back to the Vedas but as 'a relatively modern appropriation, and, therefore, misinterpretation, of older practices and symbols whose real meaning we can no longer know...' He is particularly harsh on Romila Thapar as her historical criticisms of Hinduism 'are quite negative'. Thapar, for example, regards Hinduism as a vehicle of social oppression. She also tries to show that tolerance and non-violence generally ascribed to Hinduism are myths 'that Hindus or India never really followed'. This is an erroneous conclusion as 'there is no Hindu or Buddhist tradition of crusades or holy wars like that of western religions of Christianity and Islam'. Besides, Thapar never quotes the *Upanishads* or the *Gita* in 'a favourable light' and seldom highlights the best of the Hindu tradition. Frawley also tries to prove that most Indian scholarship is imitative for want of 'a perspective' of its own. 'I must say that the most westernised, anti-religious, materialistic intellectuals I have ever met were in India, not in the West, and they were often teachers in universities'.

David Frawley takes up many more themes such as Vedanta, nature of truth, unity and universality, practical Vedanta as propounded and propagated by Swami Vivekananda, religious tolerance, Hindu view of Christianity and Islam, the yogic and the Islamic models, the inherent unity between Vedic and Shaivite religions and the eternal values of Hindu culture for mankind. Besides, he dilates on such historical issues as the Aryan invasion theory which has been questioned in western text books. He regards the Aryans and the Dravidians as part of the same culture and does not see any chasm between the East and the West.

Although Frawley provides a sympathetic view of Hindus, he is not unaware of their follies, foibles or frailties to which he occasionally refers. In social matters, Hindus continue to follow outworn social customs. On an inner level, they suffer from 'lack of creativity, initiative and original thinking'. As a group they remain disunited, have no common organization and make no attempt to stem the tide of disinformation campaign against them.

Hindus need many more Frawleys to awaken them to the quintessentials of their rich heritage, to point out the accretions of ages which need to be wiped off from the fair face of the ancient tradition of India, and to instil into them courage and confidence so essential for their political survival.

Dr. Satish K. Kapoor, Jalandhar City

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NYĀYAVĀRTIKATĀTPARYAPARIŚUDDHIḤ OF UDAYANĀCĀRYA, NYĀYACATURGRANTHIKĀ, VOL. IV; ed. Anantalal Thakur; publ. Indian Council of Philosophical Research, Rajendra Bhavan (Fourth Floor), 210 Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg, New Delhi 110 002; 1996; pp. 607+xiv; Rs. 680/-.

Professor Anantalal Thakur had undertaken a pious work of presenting four important treatises on the Nyāya system in the name of *Nyāyacaturgranthikā* project. The present work entitled *Nyāyavārtikatātparyapariśuddhiḥ* which is otherwise called simply the *Pariśuddhiḥ* is the fourth one. Udayanācārya, the author of this work, is taken as the last author of the older school of *Nyāya* and also a beginner of the Neo-School of the same. Hence, his contribution to the analysis of logical problems opens a vista in Indian Logic and Epistemology. From the historical account we have come to know that the *Tātparyapariśuddhiḥ* remained in the dark for centuries and some philosophical or textual problems were developed afterwards. In order to solve these problems the author had utilized the photocopies of Jaisalmir and Ahmedabad manuscripts and handmade copies from Tanjore and Adyar manuscripts. Besides these, the author has undertaken pains to procure a manuscript on the fifth chapter of the *Pariśuddhiḥ* from the Oriental Institute, Baroda.

Udayana has given an elaborate exposition of the views of Vācaspati Miśra, the author of the *Tātparyaṭīkā*. Among the critics of Vācaspati Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnakīrti of *Vijñānavāda* school of Buddhism are well known. Udayana is taken to be an original thinker in this field as he has refuted the critical points made by some thinkers against Vācaspati as found in the first chapter of *Pariśuddhiḥ*, which constitutes the first half of his work. The second part of it is devoted to defend Vācaspati's position after refuting the arguments given by Śrīvatsa, who is admitted as a Naiyāyika in the *Pariśuddhiḥ*.

The *Nyāyasūtras* as found in Udayana's book are found to be different from those of earlier thinkers. For Udayana the *sūtra* no. 1/1/2 is *tadanantarābhāvāt apavargaḥ* which is slightly different from *tadanantarāpāyādapavargaḥ* as found in other texts. In the same way, Udayana has shown his departure from the earlier reading of the *sūtras*. The author has accepted that, as this *Pariśuddhiḥ* is not a running commentary, it is not possible to find out what *sūtras* have been dropped. Hence, many insertions or reconstructions of Udayana become in vain.

The text begins with *Abhidheyaprayojana-sambandhaprakaraṇam* (a chapter dealing with the necessity of admitting expressibility and its relation as a category). Some of the Naiyāyikas think that there are some relations between teacher and disciple, and *Śāstras* and their explanations (Nanu Śiṣyācāryaśāstratadvyākhyānanāmapi saṁbandhaḥ kaiścit samānatāntrikaiḥ pradarśitaḥ, p. 9). There is a relation between *abhidheya* (expression) and *prayojana* (necessity). Through this expression the *Śāstra* is related to necessity (*Tasmāt prayojanamabhidheyaṁ tayoḥ saṁbandho'bhidheya-staddvārā śāstrasya prayojanena-saṁbandha-ityetadarthatvameva prathamasūtrasya nyāyyamiti*, p. 10). The other part of the same chapter deals with the definitions of *pramāṇa, prameya, nyāya*, etc. The second *āhnika* of the same chapter concentrates on the definitions of *kathā, hetuvābhāsa, chala*, etc. as done by Vācaspati.

In the second chapter, we find some philosophical problems concerning the theories of *saṁśaya, pratyakṣa, anumāna, upamāna, śabda*, etc., which are very much essential for understanding the epistemological points in *Nyāya*. The other part of the second chapter gives a critical account of the four *pramāṇas* accepted in *Nyāya*, all the *padārthas*, the non-eternity of sound, etc.

In the first part of chapter III, Udayana deals with some metaphysical questions as to the eternity of self, separate existence of mind, the diversity (*nānātva*) of the sense-organs, etc. A system becomes philosophically sound if it can defend its own position by way of refuting the positions of others. Keeping perhaps this in view, Udayana refuted the conclusions of the Buddhists in the last portion of this chapter.

The fourth chapter attains its uniqueness as it examines the concepts of *pratyabhāva, ākasmikatva, duḥkha, apavarga, tattvajñāna*, etc.

To ensure that someone's position is correct while another's is faulty, it is necessary to have a correct idea about the *hetutvābhāsa*, which is the main focus of chapter V. It raises a few problems concerning *satpratipakṣa, prakaraṇasama, upapattisama*, etc. The right cognition of the *hetutvābhāsas* help an individual to know how to detect the defects in others' arguments and how to keep one's position free from these.

From the very beginning to the end, various topics have been incorporated by Udayana after following the perfect methodology as prescribed by *nyāya-uddeśa, lakṣaṇa* and *parīkṣā*. Udayana has undertaken the method of *uddeśa* i.e. introduction of an object by name (*nāmnā saṅkīrtanam uddeśa*). Afterwards, the definition of an object already introduced has been given. At last, he has critically judged these definitions through arguments.

Professor Thakur has taken pains to edit this important treatise and to present it to scholars in

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the field. All the various readings (*pāṭhāntaras*) have been shown properly and carefully. In the footnotes the sources of such readings are given. Here the abbreviations indicating the sources of the manuscript are quite understandable. The volume is not free from printing errors, which may kindly be corrected in the next edition.

In spite of this, the book is a monumental work in the field of Indian Philosophy in general and *Nyāya* in particular. It is a *pariśuddhiḥ* in the true sense of the term as these texts purify the minds of the scholars who have a real access to the *Nyāya* literature. From the exposition of such philosophical concepts we can easily discern the purified intellect of Udayanācārya and Professor Thakur. I hope the scholars in this field would, with purity, understand the *tātparya* (*tātparya-pariśuddhiḥ*) of such a remark and agree with me in this regard.

Dr. Raghunath Ghosh, Darjeeling

1. SUDARŚANĀṢṬAKAM AND GARUḌA DAṆḌAKAM, 2. AṢṬABHUJĀṢṬAKAM AND VEGĀSETU STOTRAM, and 3. GOPĀLA VIMŚATI; VEDANTA DESIKA; 1. & 2. English translation and notes by Sri K.P. Rangaswami, and 3. English translation and notes by Sri M.K. Srinivasan and detailed analytical study by Sri K.P. Rangaswami; publ. Sri Vedanta Desika Research Centre, 2 Lakshmipuram Second Street, Villivakkam, Madras 600 049; 1996; Pages: 1. & 2. 50 each, and 3. 87; copies can be had on request to the publisher of the books against payment of postage.

Sri Vedanta Desika (AD 1268–1369) was a great saint poet of the Deccan, who left his literary legacy in Sanskrit and Tamil. Some of his compositions are in *aṃṇi pravāýam*, where poetry in Sanskrit and Tamil is presented in a beautiful blend. Vedanta Desika also excelled in the compositions of *stotra* literature. This we have in the three books under review: *Sudarśanāṣṭakam* and *Garuḍa Daṇḍakam*, *Aṣṭabhujāṣṭakam* and *Vegāsetu Stotram*, and *Gopāla Vimśati*.

Sudarśanāṣṭakam, as the name indicates is an octad in praise of Sudarśana, the cutting disc of Sri Vishnu. The eight stanzas in Sanskrit are followed by notes in English. The *stotra* is in *dhruti candas* and the last quarter of every stanza is a sort of victory chant. In his comments Sri Rangaswami has pointed out parallel references in *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā*—an important Pancarātra text. Sudarśana is also called Hetiraja—the king of weapons. Two anecdotes given here explain why Vedanta Desika composed this chant. Although the chant is in praise of Sudarśana, it reveals all the divine attributes of Sri Vishnu.

The other chant is in praise of Garuḍa, the carrier-bird of Sri Vishnu. Here also a few anecdotes are narrated which go to indicate the efficacy of this chant. This chant is in *daṇḍaka*—a metre consisting of a particular number of letters in a line. The beauty of this *stotra* is in the use of certain onomatopoeic words.

The second book in the series is *Aṣṭabhujāṣṭakam* and *Vegāsetu Stotram*. Aṣṭabhuja and Vegāsetu are two different forms of the Lord Vishnu. The eight arms (double of the usual four: *dviguṇabāhu*) are to ward with greater speed all calamities that may befall on the devotees. The Lord exhibited this trait when He rushed to the rescue of the great elephant when it was caught by the crocodile.

Lord Vishnu had consented to visit Brahma's sacrifice along with His consort, Sāvitrī. Sāvitrī, annoyed at this, decided to wash off the sacrifice. She assumed the form of the river Vegā and swelled. The Lord thereupon assumed the form of *setu* and embanked Vegā. The shrine of Vegāsetu is located near Kanchipuram.

As in the earlier book, here also the gloss of Sri Rangaswami goes a long way in explaining word by word the intricacies of this *stotra*.

The third book in the series is *Gopāla Vimśati*. These twenty stanzas are in praise of Venugopala and they are the essence of the *Gopāla Tāpanīya Upaniṣad*. The translation and notes in this booklet are by Sri M.K. Srinivasan while analytical study is presented by Sri Rangaswami. All the pranks of Bāla Gopāla while He was in Vrindavan are described here. The notes contain references to the compositions of Āṇḍāý and other Āývārs.

The purpose of publishing these *stotras* is to acquaint the young generation with the devotional content of our heritage. The *stotras* are easy to memorize and the recitation has a refreshing effect over the listeners and the reciter. The publishers believe in the potency of these *stotras* in mitigating the sufferings of humanity.

Dr. Narendranath B. Patil, Mumbai

SRI UMAPATI SIVACARYA, HIS LIFE, WORKS AND CONTRIBUTION TO SAIVISM; Ed. S.S. Janaki, Golden Jubilee Publication, The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 64 Thiru Vi. Ka. Road, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004; 1996; pp. 300 + xxii; price Rs. 150/-, $20, £15.

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This book consists of a collection of research papers presented at a Seminar on Sri Umapati Sivacarya's life and works. Though the Seminar was held in November 1988, the proceedings were published in 1996 to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of *The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute* at Chennai.

The editor, Dr. S.S. Janaki, has done a commendable job in compiling these papers that are remarkably erudite, scholarly, and perhaps a little too technical and specialized for the common reader. The book is bilingual, consisting of papers written not only in English, but also in Tamil, with major excerpts from Sanskrit texts. The papers in English have translations in Tamil, too. These papers reveal the critical acumen of writers, and their deep commitment towards the subject under study. Each paper is well documented, and provides substantial insights into the life and works of the great Tamil legend of the fourteenth century, Sri Umapati Sivacarya.

Umapati Sivam was born and bred in the famous Diksitar family who belonged to the Cidambaram Nataraja Temple. He had the privilege of performing various rituals for the deities in the Cidambaram temple that are said to uniquely blend the Vedic and Agamic conventions according to the Tillai Muvayiravar tradition. Besides, he also took to the regular Saivite initiation (Diksha) from Maraijnana Sambandhar. Umapati Sivam was a man of high spiritual attainments. He propagated Saivism in all its diverse aspects — ritualistic, mythological, theological, philosophical, etc. — among the people. The essence of his spiritual teachings lies in his works written in Tamil and Sanskrit. They exemplify his 'deep understanding of the Vedas, Vedanta and their commentaries by great ācāryas, and Agamas, all of which he aptly used in expounding the tenets of the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy' (p. xii). They also reveal his devotion to his guru, and his own personal spiritual experiences. Umapati Sivam's great Tamil work *Tiruvarutpayam* deals with 'the fruit of Divine Grace' (p. 38). It is a unique composition in the whole range of Holy Scriptures in Hinduism.

The papers provide incisive commentaries on the various works of Umapati Sivam. These engender a rich source of illuminating knowledge. The book ends with an exhaustive Bibliography of Umapati Sivam's works. This will definitely aid the serious scholar in profitably continuing his research on such a renowned philosopher and spiritual teacher.

Dr. Rama Nair, Secunderabad

THE SHAMBHALA ENCYCLOPEDIA OF YOGA; Dr. Georg Feurestein; publ. Shambhala Publications, Inc., Horticultural Hall, 300 Massachusetts Ave., Boston, Massachusetts 02115, U.S.A.; 1997; pp. 357+xxiv; Price US $30.

The book is an updated edition of the author's *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga* (N.Y., 1990). It is now published in a thoroughly revised and expanded form. It contains over two thousand entries, i.e., roughly four hundred more than the earlier edition.

Yoga, as we know, has become a global phenomenon. It is the cultural gift of India to humanity as a whole and it may represent the future culture of our planet, since it, from the very beginning, had been an advocate of non-violence and harmony between mind and matter, of course, giving primacy to the former. It is, undoubtedly, one of the oldest and the most continuous branches of spiritual inquiry and manifests India's mature answer to the universal question: 'Who am I?'

When Yogic practices started, no one can definitely assert. But that they are very old is agreed upon. The findings of Indus-Saraswati Civilizations (significantly containing the Pashupati seal) show that such a civilization existed at least four millennia before the Christian era. This stage of our world was war-free as none of the articles found during numerous excavations indicate usage of arms. A nearly full-grown civilization without arms! Cannot one be proud of it, and can't we adopt the same framework for the future? Anyway, this stage is known as Archaic or Proto Yoga. Some of the earlier Vedic texts, including the older Upaniṣads (especially *Kaṭha*, I.ii.12; *Adhyātma yoga*; *Taittirīya*, II.iv.1; *Yoga Ātmā*) represent the Pre-classical period of Yoga. The Epic period (including the *Bhagavadgītā*) presents Yoga with Sāṅkhya ontology and 'yoga' is identified here as action as against Sāṅkhya's emphasis on knowledge.

The *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali (around 200 AD), with its extensive literature in the form of commentaries and sub-commentaries, could be called the period of Classical Yoga. Patañjali compiled and systematized existing knowledge and gave Yoga a philosophical shape in addition to the psycho-technology (as expounded in *Aṣṭāṅga-Yoga*). The Tāntric and the Haṭha Yoga practices (the latter one initiated by Gorakshanatha) extended up to the 19th century AD and could be categorized as the Post-classical Yoga. The 20th century Yoga is Modern Yoga and is epitomized in the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Maharshi Mahesh Yogi is

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one of the most popular exponents of Yoga today. His Transcendental Meditation has got currency in most of the countries of the world today.

The work under review gives an authentic portrayal of the Yoga tradition and makes available the wealth of knowledge concerning Yoga to the Western readers in English. Its exposition of the *yoga-aṅgas* (six, seven or eight), *āsanas, mudrās, cakras* and biographical notes is mostly exact. The unique aspect of the work is cross-referencing (as indicated by asterisks). Each entry is alphabetically arranged and is carefully defined, at times taking recourse to illustration of postures and gestures by making use of portraits and sketches. They have great educational value for the practitioner. There are a number of orientational entries which furnish overviews of the important aspects of the Yoga system. Many entries cite original sources and, thus, inspire the reader to pursue original texts more closely.

The work provides a selective but representative range of Yogic concepts sufficient to give an authoritative coverage to the system. Compared to other similar productions, this publication is more useful to lay persons as well as to serious students of Yoga system.

There are a couple of spelling mistakes in the book. But the more striking point is the omission of entries pertaining to Ma Anandamayi whose photo is given on front jacket (top-left) and the *vaspā-mudrā*, shown in Rajasthani painting style on the front jacket (bottom right). It is hoped that they will be included in the next edition of the book.

Professor (Dr.) S.P. Dubey, Jabalpur

LORD SWAMINARAYAN (AN INTRODUCTION); Sadhu Mukundcharandas; publ. Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug Road, Ahmedabad 380 004; 1st Edn. Feb. 1997; pp. 86 + ix; Rs. 15/-.

Lord Swaminarayan (1781–1830) preached Neo-Qualified Non-dualism (*navya-viśiṣṭādvaita*) in Gujarat during the nineteenth century. He was a great spiritual leader and a social reformist. Born in village Chhapaiya (near Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, India), son of Sri Hariprasad Pandey, a Saryuparin Brahmin of humble living, Ghanashyam left home at an early age as Nilkantha in search of the goal of life. He studied at Varanasi, meditated in the Himalayas and was initiated by Ramananda in 1800 and was named Swami Sahajananda. He was also known as Narayana Muni alias Swaminarayan. During his own life-time he was worshipped as the Supreme Being Himself.

This book is an introduction of a great saint of the previous century. It portrays him through a human angle — through his work, with a passing mention of miracles worked. It gives a lucid account of his life and deeds. Special chapters have been included that give reflections and observations of scholars on the Swaminarayan sect. A brief account of his spiritual successors has also been given. Further, a glossary has been added for some original terms used frequently.

Swaminarayan preached *ekāntika-dharma* for mankind irrespective of caste, creed, colour, country or religion. His preaching insisted on righteousness and duty, knowledge, devotion and attachment with a realization of the glory of God. He was the first in Gujarat to allow non-Hindus into Hinduism. His method to instil values in low-caste people was unique. He lifted them up to a higher status by infusing great cultural values. He re-established Brahmacharya ashrama and popularized *ahiṁsaka yajñas*. He preached a great degree of purity, forbidding his disciples so much as to look on any woman they passed by. But he gave women a well-defined status. He propagated five principal vows, namely, (a) no alcohol, (b) no addiction, (c) no adultery, (d) no meat eating, and (e) no impurity of body.

The teachings of the Master are mainly to be found in *Shikshā-patrī* (The Code of Precepts) and *Vachanāmrita*. He highlighted *ātyantika mukti* (absolute salvation) in the master-servant form (*swāmī-sevaka bhāva*) and upheld the existence of five eternal realities, namely, the soul, God, *Māyā, Akshara* (Brahman) and *Purushottama* (Parabrahman). His Theistic Vedanta is an important organ of neo-Hinduism.

The present head of the Swaminarayana Sampradāya, Pramukha Swami Maharaja (b. 1921), is fifth in the order of succession. The sect has today a global organization. It has about 400 temples, 600 sadhu centres, 1700 youth centres, 2300 children centres, 700 women fora, 1100 Satsang centres and a large number of followers around the globe. The leaders of this movement have made remarkable contribution in the areas of education and health, relief works during earthquakes, flood or famine. They also have programmes for *Ādivāsi* uplift.

This Introduction will go a long way in providing initial information to a lay reader regarding the Saint and the Sect.

Professor (Dr.) S.P. Dubey, Jabalpur

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MYSTERY OF THE UNIVERSE, Mrigendra Chandra Das; publ. Sm. Sati Das, 199/2 S.K. Dav Road, Calcutta 700 048; 1997; pp. 31; Rs. 20/-.

The author of the booklet, in his preface, claims that he has established with rational arguments the following regarding the truth of the universe: (i) there is no invisible world of electron, proton, photon, electromagnetic wave, gene, etc., (ii) place, time and causality are apparent, (iii) there is no objective world, and (iv) the universe is timeless and formless which is the same as the Brahman of Advaita-Vedanta. The author has seriously formulated his arguments in support of his claims (pp. 3–23). The remaining part of the booklet consists of Swami Vivekananda's views.

In this review an attempt has been made to understand the above claims critically. Regarding the first claim, it is necessary to consider the arguments of the scientists. It has often been claimed that modern theory of micro reality has important philosophical implications. One of the implications is that factual disciplines are structured by conceptual frameworks whose function is to organize and interrelate the lower order factual information within higher order cluster of theory and inference patterns. There are reasons to justify the postulates of micro particles: Even within the conceptual framework of older Bohr's theory of atom, the spectral frequencies of hydrogen atoms and ionized helium are properly explained; micro theories provide procedure for calculating the intensities as well as the frequency of spectral lines; micro theory also generates some understanding of the phenomenon of magnetism especially by means of the concept of electron spin which is a fundamental component in Dirac's formulation; micro theory also helps to provide an understanding of complex chemical processes and provide a legitimate explanation for solid state of matter; and micro theory also provides a rational basis for the interaction of radiation and ionization potential.

Now, regarding the idealistic claims (ii) and (iii), it is necessary to consider the realistic view. The world of physical objects and persons exists and statements about physical facts can be known through sense-experience. These facts exist even if they are not perceived. The sense impressions are caused by physical things.

Regarding the fourth claim, even though Advaita-Vedanta implies an exclusive reality of Brahman, the holistic framework of Neo-Vedanta presented by Paramahamsa Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda can accommodate levels of truth and a realized individual works in the manifold world with a better perspective.

Dr. R.I. Ingalalli, Dharwad

SANSKRIT AND SCIENCE; editor-in-chief Dr. S.S. Janaki; publ. The Kuppuswami Sastri Reseach Institute, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004; first edn. 1997; pp. 173 + x; Rs. 150/-.

The book entitled *Sanskrit and Science* is the outcome of a symposium held at the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute during 1994–95. The book is in three parts.

Part I consists of the papers: 'Science and Philosophy and Art' by Dr. Raja Ramanna, 'The Clock of the Night Sky' by V. Krishnamurthy, 'Relevance of Sastra for Natural Language Processing' by P. Ramanujam, 'Knowledge Representation through Śābdabodha and Sanskrit Grammar' by D.K. Subramanian and 'A Pāṇinian Processor for Machine Translation' by S.N. Balasubramanian.

The first chapter presents a concise articulation concerning the relationship between Science and Philosophy, Philosophy and Art, and Art and Science. On author's view, even though science is separated from philosophy, they overlap each other, because both are concerned with the same fundamental concepts like reality, causality and time. There are also significant differences between philosophy and science. Empirical science has a physical framework and mathematics is the language of science. However, Kurt Godel's famous theorem implies limits of formal reasoning. Philosophy (Vedanta), on the other hand, formulates the divisions of the universe into God (*Īśvara*), living beings (*cit*) and non-living things (*acit*). Yet science and philosophy are interested in constructing the plausible theories about the evolution of life. There is a difference between philosophy and art; philosophy makes use of logic whereas art makes use of aesthetics as the basis of beauty. Both are concerned with man's position in the universe in their own ways. Science and art have mutual differences: art creates its own language whereas science uses mathematical language. However, both science and art have a desire for understanding human expressions. On author's view, the present situation in physics implies that the whole universe is built up of certain fundamental particles. Buddhist conception of reality is compared with the conditioned reality of physics even though they have different conceptual frameworks. *Kṣaṇa* theory and quantum theory seem to provide different world views. Further, quantum

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reality is articulated in terms of the lifetime of nuclei and fundamental particles. The author says (p. 9): 'The product of the life-times of mesons and baryon and their respective mass energies (appropriately defined) involved in decay process is related by the simple equation $MT = n/2$. If I take MT, where M, the mass, and T, the time, are taken together, it is quantised in a way to $n/2$ where n is an integer.' However, the meaning of " in the formula is not made explicit; it seems to be related to Planck's constant (h). If conditioned reality is also dynamic reality, and creativity is also a part of such reality, then the above understanding of reality is lopsided at least for two reasons. Firstly, physical reality by virtue of its creativity accelerates evolutionary process. Secondly, even though Einstein's equation $E = mc^2$ relates mass and energy with the square of the speed of light, there is a possibility of the converse process, of getting a mass from energy also. However, the author should be thanked for his enthusiastic attempt for comparative understanding of science, philosophy and art.

The second paper, 'The Clock of the Night Sky', consists of interesting ideas in ancient astronomy. Ancients cultivated the habit of star-gazing as a mind-elevating pursuit in the line of listening to music, thinking of the divine, etc. On author's view, clear sky during night serves as a clock. Of course, the technique of reading the sky works if the sky is clear during night; there is a need to extend such a technique to a cloudy sky with a suitable modification.

The third chapter is about the relevance of *sastras* for natural language processing; it consists of semantical analysis of grammatical and *sastric* terms of *Nyāya* and *Mīmāṁsā* systems. Natural Language Processing (NLP) is concerned with the central issue in Artificial Intelligence (AI), i.e., representation, reasoning and recognition. *Nyāya* system deals with the syntactical and semantical rules of validity. *Pāṇini's* system consists of well-structured description of Sanskrit language. However, the import of a sentence is conceived differently in grammar, *Nyāya* and *Mīmāṁsā* systems. From grammatical point of view, import of a sentence implies an activity designated by the verbal root. According to *Nyāya* and *Mīmāṁsā* systems, nominative case (agent) and intention (*bhāvanā*) are respectively considered as imports of a sentence. The author thinks that in order to utilize knowledge contained in a language, certain formats are to be devised for getting appropriate 'knowledge base'.

The fourth paper, 'Knowledge Representation through *śābdabodha* and Sanskrit Grammar', deals with the key concepts in the context of using Sanskrit language in computers. There are three views regarding the relationship between computer and Sanskrit: the first view implies that computers are used for learning and representing the components of Sanskrit language; the second view that computers are used for information storage, sorting and searching for language processing. It is possible to build multilingual dictionaries. Sanskrit grammar is considered an ideal intermediate form of language, for it consists of all structures of Indian languages and it has extensive case structures; the third view focusses on the utility of concepts like knowledge, grammar, logic/arithmetic found in literature. It is said that there is an equivalence between some form of Indian logic and Boolian logic. The author is optimistic about looking for better logical mechanisms based on semantic operators like 'and'/'not' in Indian logical theory.

Śābdabodha provides a mechanism for representation of facts. Since each word functions as a piece of information, it is easier to transform *śābdabodha* concepts into an array of coded bit maps. *Śābdabodha* can also be used to answer questions in conversation. There are plausible correlations between *śābdabodha* and propositional and predicate logic.

The next paper, '*Pāṇinian* Processors for Machine Translation' (pp. 79–102) examines the possibility of representing inflections numerically and whether such a representation offers any advantage in machine translation. Traditional grammarians had invented generalized representation of inflections (*vibhakti*) and also symbols for *akhyāta-pratyayas* so that an appropriate relation would be obtained between *prakritis* and *pratyayas*. Alternatively, computer offers a facility that if one does not want to remember *vibhakti pratyayas*, an obvious way out is to replace them by numbers in the form of arrays (p. 84). Machine translation system consists of certain steps. Input requires page reader, floppy disc, or word processor. In the sequel, inference engine as knowledge base consists of syntactical and semantical analysis. Subsequently, contextual or logical generation leads to out systems like printer and floppy disc.

Part II: 'Sanskrit and Medical Science' consists of three papers. The first paper on Vedic concepts and health (by M. Sambashivam) presents the basis of Hindu medicine in the Vedas. *Atharva-veda* gives an information about the mineral and vegetable drugs (p. 103). Seers have prescribed *sūryanamaskāra* to develop immunity from diseases. Sun, water, fire and herbs function as antidotes. Sun's ultraviolet rays have sterilizing effect.

The second paper is about the difference between *Āyurveda* and allopathic systems of medicine. *Āyurveda* is basically a spiritual science which elevates crude tendencies of the individual to nobler ones. *Āyurveda* treats the entire individual without giving rise to any side-effects. Effective treatment is also based on proper physiological

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functioning, diet pattern, behaviour pattern, etc. *Āyurvedic* system takes into consideration the genetic, physiological, emotional, spiritual, environmental and social factors. The practice of *śirasāsana* and *sarvāṅgāsana* prevents physical and mental inertia and there will be proper blood circulation to the brain so that tissues are strengthened. On the basis of research experiments it is said that practice of *yogāsanas* improves the integral health of human beings. *Prāṇāyāma* is an intentional technique of inhalation and breath retention after inhalation and exhalation. Practice of *Prāṇāyāma* helps to improve blood circulation and reduces the formation of lactic acid. Yoga therapy can be effectively supplemented with other forms of therapy. Yoga as a holistic science provides a bio-feedback mechanism; hence, it is considered as rejuvenative science.

Part III: 'Sanskrit and Other Sciences' consists of the papers 'Cartography in Ancient India', 'Svarodaya Science of Yoga for All' and 'Agriculture with Special Reference to *Kṛṣiparāsara*'. Cartography is the science and art of constructing, designing and producing maps; its subject matter is the surface of the earth and to a certain extent stars and planets. Ancient texts like *Rig-veda* and *Atharva-veda* are considered to be the first records of methodical geographical information. *Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Purāṇas* and *Tantras* have made attempts to answer questions regarding the size and shape of the earth, its support and divisions, formation of day and night, nature of earth's motion, nature of the relationship of the earth to other planets and heavenly bodies. It is said that ancient Indians made adequate use of cartography.

The next paper, 'Svarodaya Science of Yoga for All', discusses the science of prediction about one's health, the auspicious events that would take place in one's life. The author has stated the method of knowing the *svara*. The *svara* as air protects the body, like a king who protects the country. The *svara* through the left nostril is known as *iḍā* (moon) and the right as *piṅgalā* (sun). Certain types of hard work like a long journey, construction of buildings, interviews, etc. are to be performed while the *svara* is flowing in the *iḍā*. Certain other types of acts like practising mantra, fighting an opponent, seeing an important person, etc. yield the desired result if they are performed when the *svara* is moving through the *piṅgalā*. From yogic point of view, it is interesting to know that when the *svara* flows through the *suṣumnā*, the mind becomes steady as it is in the state of *manonmani* (supramental state). Sincere practice may lead to desired results.

Finally, the paper, 'Agriculture with Special Reference to *Kṛṣiparāsara*' consists of important information available in Sanskrit on agriculture. Some of the hymns of *Rig-veda* deal with various aspects of agriculture. Dharma-śāstras glorify agriculture and even recommend it to brahmins. According to *Kṛṣiparāsara*, agriculture bestows wealth and it is the mainstay of life on the earth. There is also a related information such as the prediction of rainfall, mechanism of ploughing, sowing, harvesting, irrigation, etc. Festivals are also important aspects of a farmer's life.

The book consists of many significant ideas for further research, mainly on comparative lines. The authorities of Kuppuswami Research Centre deserve thanks and we hope to expect further exploration of ancient Indian wisdom with modern dimensions.

Dr. R.I. Ingalalli, Dharwad

STOTRA-MUKTĀVALI, publ. K.P. Hegde, Thathampally, Allepy, Kerala, India; Shakabda 1919; for Nityapáráyaîam (daily recital).

This booklet on *stotras* (prayers) begins with letters of blessings by Shreemat Sudhindrateertha Shreepada and Shreemat Raghavendrateertha Shreepada. Both the letters point to the importance of *stotra* in religious and spiritual life. Normally, polite people observe the decorum of invoking the blessings of great ones and the author has followed this tradition.

Even though the contemplation of the absolute reality is the highest form of Hindu religious practice, there is in general a need for a personal God or Goddess for human adoration. The minds of the masses need *stotra* in order to programme their minds in a meaningful way by cultivating devotional feelings. The immanent God is more readily accessible to the common mind through devotional hymns. The theological teachings and descriptions in the Purāṇas explicitly state God as related to the universe in the various phases of its manifestation.

In the first *stotra, Shri Shiva Pancha-chamara Stavam*, salutations are offered to Lord Shiva to invoke his blessings. Shiva is regarded here as a great benefactor of the universe living in his abode in Mount Kailasa with his divine consort Parvati Devi, his children Ganesha and Skanda, and his vehicle Nandi. Shiva has three eyes representing the sun, the moon and the fire. He wears a *jata* (matted hair), supports Ganga on his head and the crescent moon on his matted lock. He holds a trident in his hand, besmears himself with holy ashes. He is decorated with snakes around his head, neck and arms. Normally Shiva as Yogeeshwara is visualized in a state of meditation for the good of the universe. He is mainly worshipped in

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the form of a Shivalingam which has a deep significance in mysticism representing as it does the formless and infinite Reality.

The second *stotra, Shri Ramachandra Karavalambana Stotram,* and the third *stotra, Shri Ramachandrashtakam,* contain devotional praises of Shri Ramachandra, one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Ramavatara sets a great example of dharma on earth. Valmiki in his magnificent poetry describes Rama as a personality of strength and fortitude, and as a saviour of dharma.

The fourth *stotra, Shri Venkatesha Dasavatara Stotram, Narasimhashtakam, Shri Narahari Stavanam* and *Shri Lakshmi-Narasimha Mangala-sasanam,* consist of prayers to Vishnu. According to the epics, God from whom the universe has emanated, is the divine being who reposes on the universal water of the primordial condition of the universe. *Shri Mahalakshmi Stotram* consists of beautiful hymns on the Goddess of wealth and peace. Shri Lakshmi is also believed to be the divine principle for nourishment and protection.

The author has composed these beautiful hymns which stimulate divine feelings. At the end there is a statement of utility of the recitation of *stotras* in daily life. Regular recitation of the devotional hymns causes spiritual awakening. The booklet may be used as a guide for the religious harmony within Hinduism. The publisher ought to be thanked for his generosity in providing the copies free of cost to the devotees.

Dr. R.I. Ingalalli, Dharwad

THE SONG OF THE SOUL: A Prayer Book compiled from Sanskrit texts and translated into English; Swami Gabhirananda; publ. President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, P.O. Puranattukara, Trichur 680 551; second edition, 1996; pp. 78 + xviii; Rs. 16/-.

This is the revised edition of the book first published in 1993. As mentioned by Swami Gabhiranandaji in the Preface to the second edition, some earnest Christian and Muslim aspirants have, since the first publication of the Song of the Soul, felt sincerely that the addition of select verses from their scriptures would enhance the underlying universality of the publication. Hence, a few passages from the Bible and the Quran are included in this edition.

The book contained, in its first edition, one hundred and eight pearls of Vedantic wisdom, collected from such texts as the Upanishads, the *Bhagavadgita* and the *Bhagavatam,* arranged chapter-wise with chapter titles representing the main theme. These four chapters were preceded by an Invocation and appended by hymns to Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi, and the 'Song of the Gopis' from the *Bhagavata.* The inspiring 'Song of the Sannyasin' was also included. The book had a conclusion, containing *mantras* which essentially restated the contents of the book.

The revised edition contains two hundred and one verses from the Upanishads, the *Bhagavadgita* and the *Bhagavata.* The original layout of the book has been retained. The Invocation starts with the Teacher's Benediction chosen from the *Rig-Veda.* In Chapter 2, twenty-one *mantras* are added from the *Katha Upanishad,* as word-3; the selection from the *Mundaka, Brihadaranyaka* and *Svetasvatara Upanishads* are renumbered word-4, word-5 and word-6 respectively. Eighteen more verses from the *Bhagavadgita* are included. The *Sadhana Panchakam* or *Five Verses on Spiritual Practice* by Sri Shankaracharya — a unique code of conduct for spiritual aspirants — is another addition.

The conclusion is renamed 'Gems from the Scriptures' and has three parts: Selections from the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, the Bible and the Quran.

The unity or oneness of the Self which is the subject-matter of all scriptures is the theme of the book. It conveys the message: anyone worshipping *his* God in any part of the world through *his* process of worship would be worshipping the *same* God worshipped by *all* religions.

An invaluable gem has been offered by Swami Gabhiranandaji of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Trichur, at a very nominal price. Whoever recite these *mantras,* while meditating on their lofty meaning, are bound to be benefited in every way.

Dr. Chetana Mandavia, Junagadh

HOW TO OVERCOME MENTAL TENSION; Swami Gokulananda; Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta 700 029; 1997; pp. 238+xxxiv; Rs. 30/-.

'The genesis of this book lies,' says Gokulanandaji, 'in the repeated request I get as Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, for personal interviews by people who are bogged down by the problems of life. Most of them come to discuss their personal problems and almost all these problems are related to mental tension. Therefore, I decided to give a series of lectures which were taped and edited to take the shape, finally, of this book.'

This is the unique feature of the book: it emerges out of the author's intimacy with problems of stress and its management, tension and its

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resolution. Moreover, the Swami is vastly familiar with the Western psychiatric strategies; but, then, his orientations are centrally spiritual stemming from the eminently practical methods of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta. Thus both the Western concerns for a 'healthy' mind and the 'Eastern' commitment to interior realization as the panacea for mental dis-ease are effectively blended in this eminently readable, uniquely pragmatic handbook.

Within a compass of eighteen closely reasoned chapters (drawing everywhere on his experience with 'disturbed' people), Revered Gokulanandaji traverses, virtually, the entire field of mental tension and its redress. Beginning with a lucid analysis of the impact of body-mind complex in generating stress, he discusses such related issues as higher values, world views in relation to mental states, etc. This could be described as diagnosis and the bulk of this chapter is, as it were, the interior medicine with all its components. Besides an illuminating exposition of prayer as an antidote to stress, rooted as it is on the infinite possibilities of the Self, the Swami deepens the diagnosis by an intensive, in-depth role of meditation in coming to terms with the 'stressed' mind. These chapters (9 to 12) are full of insights reflecting the authenticity and immediacy of the whole field of meditation vis-a-vis mental maladies. (No surprise, this, for one familiar with the revered Swami's earlier classic *Some Guidelines to the Goal Supreme*.)

But what the discerning reader finds valuable is the Swami's unflinching, positive approach to the whole problem. He brings out the creative aspects of stress even while controverting its excesses. From this perspective, the entire book radiates the feeling that, as one of the chapters puts is, 'living is fun' if, as the final chapter clinches, we practise 'the presence of God'.

In short, *How to Overcome Mental Tension* (carrying an appreciative Foreword by Revered Swami Lokeswaranandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture) is a precious little book invaluable for those who seek redress to mental tension and indispensable to all those who realize thereby that spiritual orientations alone are the final answer. With its tone of familiarity and simplicity combined with pragmatism, this book is bound to become a classic.

Dr. M. Sivaramkrishna, Hyderabad

SPIRITUAL SAYINGS OF SRI RAM; Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., L 10 Green Park Extn., New Delhi 110 016; 1997; p. 63; Rs. 30/-.

The booklet does not contain any preface or introduction. There is no foreword and there is no indication of author. The book cover displays an anonymous photograph, presumably of the author or the compiler. If this is so, we may identify the author as Sri Ram, a contemporary man of wisdom and not Sri Ram of Ramayana. As the title indicates, these are sayings containing profound wisdom and may spur one towards spirituality.

All these sayings are grouped under twenty-three heads such as God, Spirituality, Prayer, Wisdom, Desire, Death, Marriage, and so on. Thus, under Marriage, we find: 'Marriage is a bond beyond biology,' 'Real marriage is a journey from conjugal delight to cosmic divinity'.

On Death, the author says: 'Death is an introduction to eternity'. Again, 'Death is there because God wants to enhance the beauty of life'. Under Spirituality the author states: 'Spirituality is the ability to remain unshaken when your heart is broken.' 'Spirituality is the ability to remain unperturbed by the turbulent paradoxes of life'.

All these sayings have an unfading freshness and reading a few thoughts from this booklet will always be refreshing.

Dr. Narendranath B. Patil, Mumbai

BHAGAVAD GITA; Swami Satyananda Saraswati; trans. Vittalananda Saraswati; publ. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 41 U.A. Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007; 1997; pp. 249+iv; $12.95 (price in Rupees not printed).

This is yet another print of Bhagavad Gita with a difference. Swami Satyananda Saraswati of Napa, California (USA), presents here the Gita in original Sanskrit, along with Roman transliteration and English translation. The beauty of this translation is that, here the personal names are interpreted in a very significant way. This has erased all the difference in time and space and has rendered the text into a plain mirror, in which the reader can see his own reflection.

The very first words, *'dharmakshetre kurukshetre'* have been translated as 'In the battle to manifest the ideal of perfection, in the battlefield of all action and all behaviour'. Here, Arjuna is 'Clarity of pure devotion' and Dhananjaya is 'Conqueror of wealth'. Pandavas are 'Those without prejudice' and Duryodhana is 'Defender of Evil'. Sanjaya is one 'Who is victorious over all'. Here, Krishna means 'Doer of all', and Karna means 'Who thinks himself a doer'. Purushottama means 'Excellent Perfect Consciousness', and Yogeshvara means 'Lord of Union'. A glossary of such words is appended at the end.

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Such a substitution of original Sanskrit words with meaningful words has divested the text from the original story on the battlefield and has set it against the backdrop of the present-day living world. The translator states that it is necessary to study the Gita as it related to our own personal struggle, not necessarily how Arjuna resolved his dilemma. More important, how I am going to solve mine.

The translation is extremely lucid and the diction, excellent. I quote two stanzas by way of example:

The soul who practises union, who has controlled the objects of consciousness in union, is compared to a still flame without flicker in a place with no wind. (6.19)

When by the practice of union the objects of consciousness are restrained and the mind ceases from motion, and when the soul is perceived by the soul, the soul is satisfied. (6.20)

The translation thus captures the spirit of the Gita. It appeals to both, the *jnanis* and *bhaktas*, and it teaches the path of Yoga as propounded by Hrishikesha Krishna — Ruler of the senses and the doer of all.

The print and paper are good. The book will satisfy the students of Gita.

Dr. Narendranath B. Patil, Mumbai

ŚRĪ KANAKADHĀRĀ STAVAM OF ŚRĪMAT ŚAṄKARA BHAGAVATPĀDA; Kalluri Suryanarayana; publ. Sāṅkhyāyana Vidyā Parishat, H. No. 2-12-34 Annapurna Colony, Uppal, Hyderabad 500 039, Andhra Pradesh; 1998; pp. 53+v; Rs. 45/-.

Kanakadhārā Stavam, it is said, is an early composition of Ācārya Śaṅkara, while he was yet a boy of eight. On his usual round of *Mādhukarī*, he stopped at the doorstep of an old woman with the words, '*Om Bhavati bhikṣhāṁ dehi*'. The old woman was so poor that she had nothing to offer except a dried *āmalaki*. She offered it to the *baṭu* with total devotion. Śaṅkara was moved to see her plight and prayed to Lakṣmī with a composition of 22 *ślokas*. Here are various appellations and they depict the divine qualities of the Goddess. It is said that Lakṣmī was pleased with this *stava* and showered gold *āmalakis* in the courtyard of the old woman.

The entire *stavam* is melodious and the appellations beautifully describe the Goddess in the most endearing and glorious terms. The *stavam* is transliterated in Roman script and a lucid English translation is also provided. The book also contains three other *stotras*, viz., *Dāridrya Dahana Stuti*, *Lakṣmī Aṣṭottaram* and *Aṣṭa Lakṣmī Stotram*. These also are followed by English translation.

While presenting the Sanskrit text, the words have been split for easy comprehension, but this may, at times, confuse the readers.

Reciting all these *stotras*, one may develop devotion, and the efforts of the author are aimed at this end.

Dr. Narendranath B. Patil, Mumbai

HEALTH THROUGH BALANCE (An Introduction to Tibetan Medicine); Yeshi Donden; ed. and trans. Jeffrey Hopkins; co-trans. Dr. Lobsang Ragbay & Allan Wallace; publ. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 41 U.A. Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007; 1997 (First South Asian Ed.); pp. 252; Rs. 150/-.

The colonization of the Asian and African nations by the British and the other Europeans dealt a heavy blow to the culture of these countries. The introduction of allopathic system of medicine, with the label of 'modern medicine' brought many traditional systems of medicine to a near extinction.

The latter part of the twentieth century saw rapid strides in the allopathic system and it got compartmentalized into specialties and superspecialties. With this, there also dawned the realization that studying the body, where all organs and systems are inter-connected, in parts is not always beneficial. The West therefore started looking towards the Orient, where the traditional health-care systems have always been holistic in concept and approach. The West started travelling to Asia to learn Ayurveda, acupuncture, Yoga and so on. Teachers from Asia, some genuine and some not so genuine, travelled westward and captured very receptive and appreciative learner groups.

Yeshi Donden, a Tibetan medical practitioner, came as a refugee to India and started treating other compatriot refugees. Later, he also became the personal physician to H.H. the Dalai Lama. Tibet, mainly due to its geographical location, had remained a highly insulated country and was able to maintain the purity of its cultural traditions. Donden, in 1980, gave a series of lectures in the USA on Tibetan Medicine. These were translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins and first published as a book in the USA in 1986. The book under review is the First South Asian Edition.

A perusal of the book shows that the Tibetan System of Medicine is based on Ayurveda (the reviewer has very little knowledge of Ayurveda), although Hopkins in his preface to the book says it is derived from the 'Indian Buddhist Medicine'. To the best of one's knowledge, there has never been such an existence.

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As in Ayurveda, Tibetan Medicine centres round the three humours (*tridosha*), namely, wind (*Vaata*), bile (*Pitta*), and phlegm (*Kapha*). It also considers all diseases as psychosomatic, in the sense that there is always a close interaction between the body and the mind, in the causation, result and response to treatment. Disease and suffering are also dependent on Prārabdha karma. Pulse reading (*naadi pareeksha*), is an important part of diagnosis in this system too. There are four texts called Tantras, which need to be studied by the prospective practitioner (prior to the treatises by Charaka and Susruta, Ayurvedic texts were also called Tantras). The Tibetans believe that it was the Buddha (Sakyamuni) who gave these texts.

The book has 18 chapters and gives in detail and in a lucid manner the composition of the body, diagnosis, and treatment, where diet plays an important part. Tibetan System of Medicine also believes in the role of spirits in the causation of disorders. It lays emphasis on the need of a disciplined, ethical life for the preservation of good health. A good bibliography is presented at the end of the book. The book will be of interest to those who wish to know, in some detail, the principles of the Tibetan health-care system.

Dr. Kamala S. Jaya Rao, Hyderabad

VEDANTA IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN SCIENCE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY; Swami Mukhyananda; publ. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007; 1997; pp. 301 + xvii; Rs. 250/-.

Three radical changes seem to shape the contemporary thought patterns. There is a cognitive radicalism with scholars of almost all disciplines conceding the role of the observer in cognition. There is communicative revolution, electronic media affecting both the visual and the verbal, reducing the globe to a village. These two are shaped by the third one, the comparative, pluralistic methodology striving for areas of approximation.

Mukhyanandaji's study is in tune with these concerns. A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, his contribution in these areas hardly needs introduction. (His *Hinduism: A Brief Outline of Its Framework*, Ramakrishna Math, Trichur, 1986, remains a classic in this area.) With this background, the present book raises the expectations of the knowledgeable reader. Obviously the area of Vedanta and science is crowded. But this book is by an insider as it were, a practising Vedantist's exposition stemming from the core of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta.

In the book under review, Swami Mukhyananda offers a closely reasoned study with seven chapters covering 'What is Vedanta?', 'Some Aspects of Vedanta and Science', 'Scientific Approach —Indian and Western', 'Is Vedanta Contradictory to Science?', 'Samkhya, Modern Western Science and Advaita Vedanta', and 'Modern Western Science and Advaita Vedanta (on the nature of the universe and its origin)'. There are also charts at the end on the evolution of Brahmanda (the Cosmic Universe) done with his usual thoroughness. Moreover, we also learn that the Swami sent the first two of his papers to scientists, emphasizing the need for the harmonious combination of Vedanta and Science as advocated by Swami Vivekananda, to evolve an integrated world-view of the spiritual and material verities of the total existential Reality.[1] This revealed an interesting divide, 'some scientists and others in England and USA did appreciate his views. But Indian scientists,' he says, 'were mostly averse or callous and did not respond at all'. The exceptions were Prof. P.M. Bhargava, Director, CCMB, Hyderabad, and Dr. T.S. Murty, Director, M.P. Council of Science and Technology, Bhopal. In fact, the author met them by appointment for personal discussion. His replies to Prof. Bhargava's queries in a letter earlier are discussed in Chapter Five.

The author says, 'While the central or highest tradition of the Vedas, that is the Advaita Vedanta, mostly concerns itself with the investigation of the internal foundational reality, with the discovery of the Real Man, who seeks and discovers everything, and his true nature, it was not in contradiction to the external knowledge and the empirical methods applied there, but in harmonious integration with the internal and external aspects of the total reality, since the Vedanta holds that the One Reality is manifesting on different levels.' As far as it goes, this is a cautious statement but the question of Real Man and One Reality and a harmonious integration seems to need more rigorous clarity.[1] Similarly, the suggestion that we should enlarge the scope of science to make it integral is welcome but one should be rigorous in the use of both the terms—science and integralism.[2] (1 & 2—According to the author, these aspects have been treated in the course of the book at relevant places. —Swami Satyapriyananda.)

This is not to underestimate the details of the book. The arguments are persuasive, but the conclusions seem to be heavily privileged. Much more analysis seems to be needed. Perhaps scientists are equally prejudiced, but then the Vedantist has the advantage of a long tradition of tolerance and dissent as the starting-point of re-visioning. Can the potential be actualized? This is the question which the book raises, for that one is very grateful to the Swami.

Dr. M. Sivaramkrishna, Hyderabad

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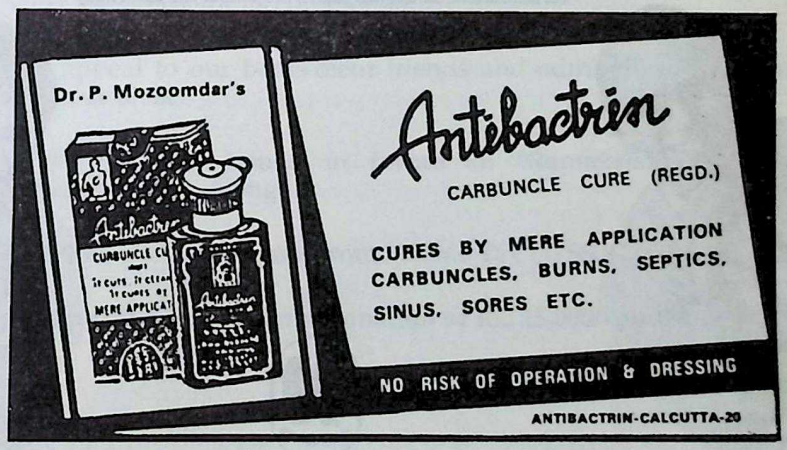

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AN APPEAL

Construction of a Guest House and a Charitable Clinic

Swami Vivekananda said: 'Let New India arise out of the peasant's cottage grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts and from markets. Let her emerge from groves and from forests, from hills and mountains'- A visit to **Ramakrishna Mission, Along, West Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh,** will convince anyone that the monks of the Ramakrishna Order are translating this dream of Swami Vivekananda into practice both verbatim and in sprit. Yet because of its remoteness, many people in our great country do not know much about it although the Government of India honoured this Institution with the **National Award for best work in Child Welfare.**

The Institution urgently needs some development in its infrastructure; for example, a Guest House for visiting Monks and devotees and also a charitable clinic for the tribals living below the Mac Mohan line. These are some of the immediate needs for which the Government funds are not coming forthwith. At least Rs.10 lakhs are necessary for its completion.

We, therfore, appeal to our benevolent friends and admirers to contribute their mite for this great cause.

Cheques/drafts may be issued in favour of **"Ramakrishna Mission Along"**-on State Bank of India, Along.

Donations for this work are exempt from Income Tax U/S80G of I.T.Act,1961.

We shall put up suitable tablets for donation of Rs. 25,000/- and above.

Swami Ishtananda
Secretary

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We want to lead mankind to the place where there is
neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran;
yet this has to be done by harmonising
the Vedas, the Bible, and the Koran.

Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the
varied expressions of THE RELIGION,
which is Oneness, so that each
may choose the path
that suits him best.

—Swami Vivekananda

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Duty becomes a disease with us; it drags us ever forward. It catches hold of us and makes our whole life miserable. It is the bane of human life. This duty, this idea of duty is the midday summer sun which scorches the innermost soul of mankind. Look at those poor slaves to duty! Duty leaves them no time to say prayers, no time to bathe. Duty is ever on them. They go out and work. Duty is on them! They come home and think of the work for the next day. Duty is on them! It is living a slave's life, at last dropping down in the street and dying in harness, like a horse. This is duty as it is understood. The only true duty is to be unattached and to work as free beings, to give up all work unto God.

—Swami Vivekananda

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SRI RAMAKRISHNA SEVA SANGHA

(Registered under Societies Registration Act—Act XXI of 1860)

JAGANNATHNAGAR, P.O. DHURAWA, RANCHI, BIHAR 834 004

AN APPEAL

The Brahmacharya Sangha was registered under the Societies Registration Act 1960 vide Registration NO. 352/1929–30 dated 25.2.1930, Bengal, having its activities at Ranchi for propagation of the principles of Satya and Dharma and for catering to the educational needs of the poor, specially tribals. Accordingly, the Brahmacharya Vidyapith was established and is running a school since its inception by benevolent patrons and devotees. Subsequently, the Brahmacharya Sangha acquired land and constructed building separately for running a Middle and High School in the premises at Nibaranpur, Ranchi 834 002. The said Institution is running since last sixty eight years and serving the down-trodden and weaker sections of the society by rendering education in the Ranchi town and adjoining areas. The said school is recognized by the Government of Bihar and declared as, linguistic and minority Institution. Due to unavoidable circumstances, the management was unable to manage the Institution any further and accordingly decided to amalgamate the Brahmacharya Sangha with Sri Ramakrishna Seva Sangha, a Charitable Institution registered in 1965 under the India Societies Act (Act XXI of 1960), which is similarly catering to the educational needs in Ranchi.

The existing school building is in a most dilapidated condition and requires immediate reconstruction. The Members of Sri Ramakrishna Seva Sangha, have decided to construct a new school building with all modern accessories and fittings including Assembly / Community Hall, for carrying out various cultural and educational activities and to serve the weaker sections of society for which a minimum amount of Rs. 50 (fifty) lakhs will be required.

We, therefore, appeal to our benevolent friends and admirers to contribute their mite for this great cause.

Cheques / Drafts may kindly be drawn in favour of "SRI RAMAKRISHNA SEVA SANGHA, RANCHI-4". All donations to SRI RAMAKRISHNA SEVA SANGHA, RANCHI-4 are exempt from Income Tax under Section 80-G.

Sri Ramakrishna Seva Sangha,
C/o Brahmacharya Sangha Vidyapith
P.O. Nibaranpur, Ranchi 834 002, Bihar

R.D. BHATTACHARYA
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Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library. If education were identical with information, the libraries would be the great sages in the world and encyclopedias the Rishis.

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SRI RAMAKRISHNA SEVA SANGHA

(Registered under Societies Registration Act—Act XXI of 1860)

JAGANNATHNAGAR, P.O. DHURAWA, RANCHI, BIHAR 834 004

AN APPEAL

In 1963 (the birth Centenary Year of Swami Vivekananda) a group of devotees of the Ramakrishna Mission in the HEC Complex, Ranchi-4, under the inspired guidance and blessings of Revered Srimat Swami Vedantanandaji Maharaj, the then Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission TB Sanatorium, Ranchi and Patron of Seva Sangha, formed an Association named "SRI RAMAKRISHNA SEVA SANGHA" in HEC Township for self-realisation through workship and selfless services. The Seva Sangha was registered in 1965 under the Indian Societies Registration Act (ACT XXI of 1960). The Sangha was blessed by Revered Srimat Swami Vireshwaranandaji Maharaj, Revered Srimat Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, 10th, 11th and 12th President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission; Revered Srimat Swami Abhayanandaji Maharaj, (Revered Bharat Maharaj), Revered Srimat Swami Dayanandaji Maharaj, Revered Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, present President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission and Revered Srimat Swami Lokeshwaranandaji Maharaj besides other Revered swamijis.

In 1969, a plot of land was allotted by Heavy Engineering Corporation Ltd., Ranchi for establishing a school. Accordingly, the foundation of the school named "VIVEKANANDA VIDYA MANDIR" was laid on the auspicious day of RATH YATRA in the year 1970. The Institution has started Senior Secondary Section (+2) from April, 1992 with Science Stream.

The Vidya Mandir has attained its objectives and the results of the Institution is outstanding.

The School complex is unfinished and for which a minimum amount of Rs. 12 lakhs will be required for construction of class rooms.

We, therefore, appeal to our benevolent friends and admirers to contribute their mite to this great cause. Cheques / Drafts may be issued in favour of "SRI RAMAKRISHNA SEVA SANGHA, RANCHI-4". All donations to SRI RAMAKRISHNA SEVA SANGHA, RANCHI-4, are exempt from Income Tax under Section 80-G.

Sri Ramakrishna Seva Sangha,
C/o Brahmacharya Sangha Vidyapith
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Each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great universal truth, and spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is, therefore, addition, not exclusion. That is the idea. System after system arises, each one embodying a great idea, and ideals must be added to ideals. And this is the march of humanity. Man never progresses from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lesser truth to higher truth—but it is never from error to truth.

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There is to be found in every religion the manifestation of this struggle towards freedom. It is the groundwork of all morality, of unselfishness, which means getting rid of the idea that men are the same as their little body. When we see a man doing good work, helping others, it means that he cannot be confined within the limited circle of "me and mine". There is no limit to this getting out of selfishness. All the great systems of ethics preach absolute unselfishness as the goal. Supposing this absolute unselfishness can be reached by a man, what becomes of him? He is no more the little Mr. So-and-so; he has acquired infinite expansion. The little personality which he had before is now lost to him for ever; he has become infinite, and the attainment of this infinite expansion is indeed the goal of all religions and of all moral and philosophical teachings.

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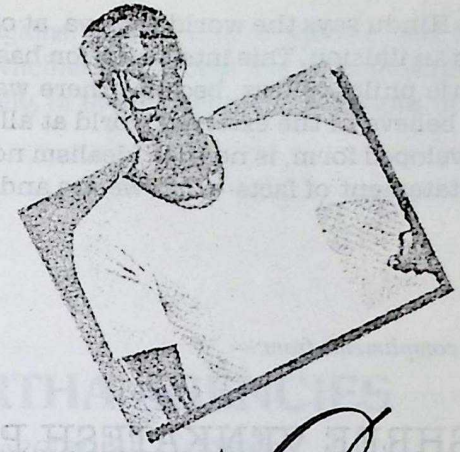

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May their souls find eternal rest at the lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna

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When the Hindu says the world is Maya, at once people get the idea that the world is an illusion. This interpretation has some basis, as coming through the Buddhistic philosophers, because there was one section of philosophers who did not believe in the external world at all. But the Maya of the Vedanta, in its last developed form, is neither Idealism nor Realism, nor is it a theory. It is a simple statement of facts--what we are and what we see around us.

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SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON NATIONAL IDEAL

At the heart of every nation's life, lives an ideal which is its reason for existence. As long as that ideal is strong, the nation will be vital; if it is weakened, the nation is affected; and if it dies, the nation's end is near. All outside influence on a nation must be assimilated, not imitated; and all such assimilation must harmonize with this national ideal.

—*Prabuddha Bharata* (Vol. 100, Jan, 1995, p. 337)

WITH COMPLIMENTS

A DEVOTEE FROM LUCKNOW

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It is a significant fact that all religions, without one exception, hold that man is a degeneration of what he was, whether they clothe this in mythological words, or in the clear language of philosophy, or in the beautiful expressions of poetry.

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Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.

—Swami Vivekananda

FROM A WELL WISHER

The living God is within you, and yet you are building churches and temples and believing all sorts of imaginary nonsense. The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body. Of course all animals are temples too, but man is the highest, the Taj Mahal of temples. If I cannot worship in that, no other temple will be of any advantage. The moment I have realised God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him—that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free.

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As no man can jump out of his own self, so no man can go beyond the limits that have been put upon him by the laws of time and space. Every attempt to solve the laws of causation, time, and space would be futile, because the very attempt would have to be made by taking for granted the existence of these three. What does the statement of the existence of the world mean, then? "This world has no existence." What is meant by that? It means that it has no absolute existence. It exists only in relation to my mind, to your mind, and to the mind of everyone else. We see this world with the five senses but if we had another sense, we would see in it something more. If we had yet another sense, it would appear as something still different. It has, therefore, no real existence; it has no unchangeable, immovable, infinite existence. Nor can it be called non-existence, seeing that it exists, and we have to work in and through it. It is a mixture of existence and non-existence.

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That is the one cause of misery: we are attached, we are being caught. Therefore says the Gita: Work constantly; work, but be not attached; be not caught. Reserve unto yourself the power of detaching yourself from everything, however beloved, however much the soul might yearn for it, however great the pangs of misery you feel if you were going to leave it; still, reserve the power of leaving it whenever you want.

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What good is it if we acknowledge in our prayers that God is the Father of us all, and in our daily lives do not treat every man as brother?

—*Swami Vivekananda*

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Man thinks foolishly that he can make himself happy, and after years of struggle finds out at last that true happiness consists in killing selfishness and that no one can make him happy except himself.

—Swami Vivekananda

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"The poor, the down-trodden, the ignorant—let these be your God"—Swami Vivekananda

AN APPEAL TO THE GENEROUS PUBLIC

Located in very remote rural area in Bankura district, West Bengal, the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ramharipur, an affiliated branch of the Ramakrishna Mission founded by the great patriot monk Swami Vivekananda, has been trying its best to serve the local poor and backward people of whom a large number belong to the SC/ST communities through various educational and social welfare activities since its inception in the 1940's.

In brief, the centre runs a high school, a basic primary school, a students' hostel, an adult night-education centre for SC/ST people, 4 free village coaching centres for poor and backward class students etc., along with its other multifarious rural welfare services to the poor & needy.

But most of the school buildings are nearly 50 years old, and the oldest one, a mud-wall house, is on the verge of collapse! Other old buildings also need immediate attention and renovation. Repair and replacement of old furniture, lighting & fan system are also long overdue. We maintain many free SC/ST students in our hostel and we want to introduce a computer training course in our school. The construction of boundary walls is also necessary for the security of students.

The State Government pays only the salaries of school staff and does not pay for maintenance or new constructions. As per State Government rules, we can collect Rs. 65/- only from a student per year. Local people are mostly poor and, hence, cannot contribute anything.

Therefore, for all these activities we depend very much on the charity of generous people.

In this stringent financial condition, we appeal to the generous public to contribute liberally for the following projects:

1. Construction of School building and replacing the present dilapidated mud-wall house	Rs.	14,92,029.00
2. Repair and renovation of other old buildings	Rs.	4,21,246.00
3. New furniture and maintenance of old ones	Rs.	55,540.00
4. Lighting and fan system and its maintenance	Rs.	63,965.00
5. Introducing new computer training course	Rs.	1,00,000.00
6. Maintenance charge for ten free SC/ST students	Rs.	1,20,000.00
7. Construction of boundary walls	Rs.	12,59,991.00
TOTAL	Rs.	35,12,671.00

Donations to Ramakrishna Mission are exempted from Income Tax under section 80G. Cheque / DD may be drawn in favour of "RAMAKRISHNA MISSION ASHRAMA, RAMHARIPUR" and the purpose of the donation should be clearly stated.

Dated: Ramharipur
20/06/1998

Swami Tattwasthananda
SECRETARY

"Feel, my children, feel; feel for the poor, the ignorant, the down-trodden..."—Swami Vivekananda

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They alone live, who live for others,
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—*Swami Vivekananda*

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The God in you is the God in all. If you have not known this, you have known nothing. How can there be difference? It is all one. Every being is the temple of the Most High; if you can see that, good, if not, spirituality has yet to come to you.

— Swami Vivekananda

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"India will progress only according to her own national genius which she has cultivated for centuries. Nothing will thrive in India unless it has a religious basis. In religion also anything that goes against the universal idea of India would be jarring and not acceptable to the country. I appeal to all the followers of Sri Ramakrishna to take to the rebuilding of the nation vigourously both individually and by organising more institutions in the name of Sri Ramakrishna. The spiritual message of Sri Ramakrishna has a potential to usher in a new civilisation, the signs of which we are seeing all around in different parts of the world.

And, therefore, it is incumbent on all of us, all the members of the Sangha, to live up to these great ideals and to help others to do the same. We should try to propagate these ennobling ideals all over India, in every nook and corner of it, as well as outside India. The real India lives in villages. Unless the tribal and the backward people are given a lift not only economically but culturally and spiritually, there is no hope for India. I hope all of you will try to implement all these plans in your life.

I pray to Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swamiji that wherever you be in future, maybe on the top of the mountain or at the bottom of the ocean, or in the jungle, or in the city, wherever you may be, I pray to Them to take care of all of you. That is my earthiest prayer to them."

—Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj
former President, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati (1927–38)
and 10th President of the Ramakrishna Order (1966–85)
quoted from "Make India Great", Advaita Ashrama (1981), pp. 8–9, 11, 13, 16.

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What you call matter, or spirit, or mind, or anything else you may like to call them, the fact remains the same: we cannot say that they are, we cannot say that they are not. We cannot say they are one, we cannot say they are many. This eternal play of light and darkness—indiscriminate, indistinguishable, inseparable—is always there. A fact, yet at the same time not a fact; awake and at the same time asleep. This is a statement of facts, and this is what is called Maya. We are born in this Maya, we live in it, we think in it, we dream in it. We are philosophers in it, we are spiritual men in it, nay, we are devils in this Maya, and we are gods in this Maya. Stretch your ideas as far as you can, make them higher and higher, call them infinite or by any other name you please, even these ideas are within this Maya. It cannot be otherwise, and the whole of human knowledge is a generalisation of this Maya trying to know it as it appears to be. This is the work of Nama-Rupa—name and form. Everything that has form, everything that calls up an idea in your mind, is within Maya; for everything that is bound by the laws of time, space and causation is within Maya.

—Swami Vivekananda

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PRINCIPAL

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All knowledge that the world has ever received comes from the mind; the infinite library of the universe is in your own mind. The external world is simply the suggestion, the occasion, which sets you to study your own mind, but the object of your study is always your own mind. The falling of an apple gave the suggestion to Newton, and he studied his own mind. He rearranged all the previous links of thought in his mind and discovered a new link among them, which we call the law of gravitation. It was not in the apple nor in anything in the centre of the earth. All knowledge, therefore, secular or spiritual, is in the human mind.

—*Swami Vivekananda*

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That soul has not been awakened that never feels weakness, never feels misery....We do not want that. At the same time, we not only want this mighty power of love, this mighty power of attachment, the power of throwing our whole soul upon a single object, losing ourselves and letting ourselves be annihilated, as it were, for other souls--which is the power of the gods--but we want to be higher even than the gods. The perfect man can put his whole soul upon that one point of love, yet he is unattached.

—*Swami Vivekananda*

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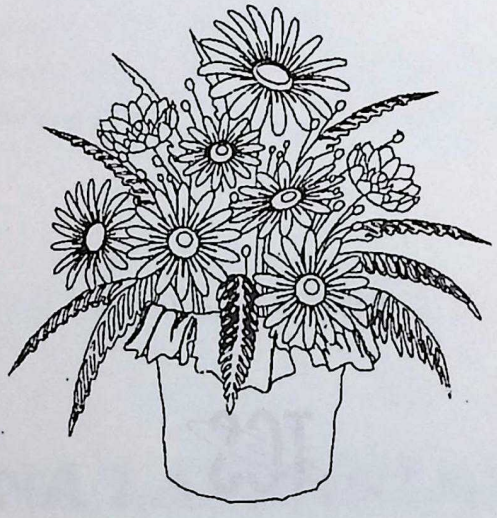

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He is everywhere, the pure and formless One, the Almighty and the All-merciful. "Thou art our father, Thou art our mother, Thou art our beloved friend, Thou art the source of all strength; give us strength. Thou art He that beareth the burdens of the universe; help me bear the little burden of this life." Thus sang the Rishis of the Vedas. And how to worship Him? Through love. "He is to be worshipped as the one beloved, dearer than everything in this and the next life."

—Swami Vivekananda

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Our great defect in life is that we are so much drawn to the ideal, the goal is so much more enchanting, so much more alluring, so much bigger in our mental horizon, that we lose sight of the details altogether. But whenever failure comes, if we analyse it critically, in ninety-nine per cent of cases we shall find that it was because we did not pay attention to the means.

—Swami Vivekananda

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Surely we ought to be able to do as much in this life of ours—comparatively free, easy, and comfortable. Most of us here have more time than we think we have, if we really want to use it for good. With the amount of freedom we have we can attain to two hundred ideals in this life, if we will...

—Swami Vivekananda

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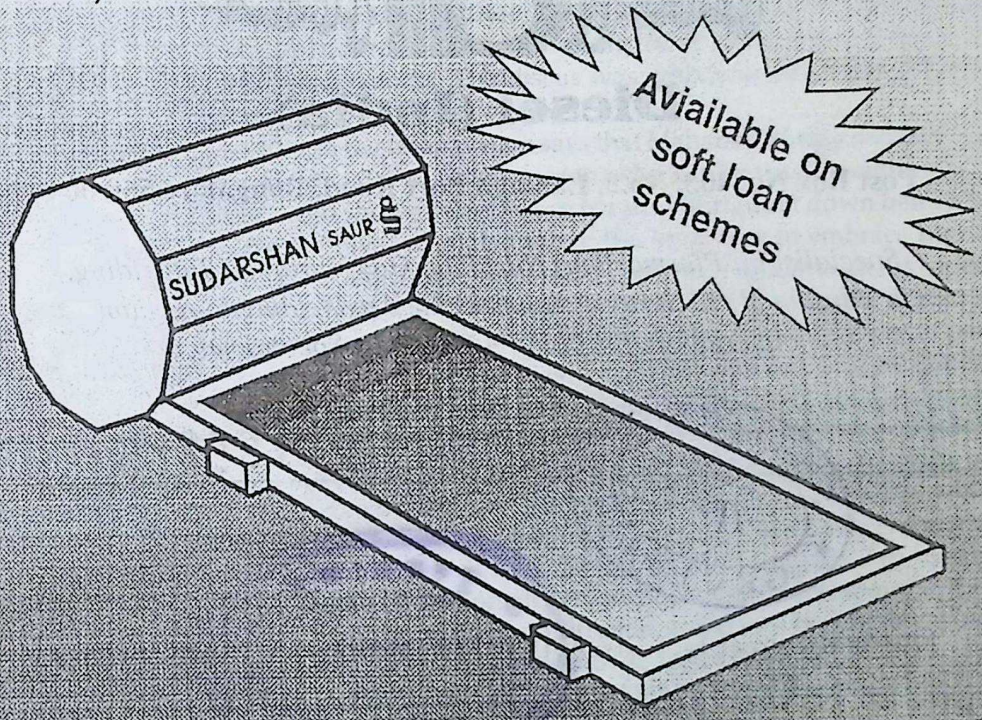

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THIS is the great fact: strength is life, weakness is death. Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal; weakness is constant strain and misery: weakness is death.

—*Swami Vivekananda*

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(Continued from the previous issue)

BHRIGU VĀRUNI

The Ramayana relates how Vishnu, in his incarnation as Sri Rama, had to suffer separation for some time from Sri Sita, in order to fulfil Bhrigu's curse. In a battle between *devas* and *asuras* (beings with divine and demonic temperaments respectively), the latter being routed;Diti, their grief stricken mother approached Puloma, Bhrigu's wife, for help. The compassionate Puloma, commenced severe meditations and transferred her waxing powers to the surviving *asuras*. The *devas* in the meanwhile appraised Vishnu of it, who hurled a thunderbolt and severed Puloma's head from her body. Bhrigu was stunned. He cursed that the Lord too, like him, would have to experience the grief of separation from his consort. Vishnu then flung the divine discus at Bhrigu, who seeing it coming, begged forgiveness. The discus was withdrawn but Bhrigu's curse stayed. Bhrigu later brought Puloma back to life.

A popular story in the Bhagavatam says that Maharshi Bhrigu was deputed by some sages, to settle the dispute as to who among the Trinity was preeminent. Bhrigu first went to Brahma, who showed annoyance because Bhrigu sat down before being asked to. He next went to Shiva, who glad to see the sage, rose to embrace him but Bhrigu shrank back. Shiva became furious and was about to strike him with his trident. He next proceeded to test Vishnu, whom he found sleeping. His ire aroused, Bhrigu kicked him on the chest. Vishnu awoke to find the sage glowering. The Lord begged pardon, massaged the foot with which he had kicked him and treated him with kindness.

In the vast mass of Indian religious literature, the grandest are the Upanishads. The Taittiriya Upanishad, a section of the Yajur-Veda, has a chapter called *Bhriguvalli*, remarkable for its sublimity. Bhrigu approaches his father Varuna with the request: 'Revered sir, teach me Brahman.' Varuna replies thus: '...Crave to know well, that from which all these things take birth, that by which they live after being born, that towards which they move and into which they merge.' He leads his son, step by step from the gross to the subtle realms of the human personality and the corresponding macrocosmic reality. The pupil's high calibre in concentration, aided him in realizing truth at successive stages, culminating in the supreme knowledge of Brahman.

'Reality' being inscrutable, it can only be thought of in its conditioned aspects. The Lord says in the Gita, that splendour and greatness among beings is to be meditated upon *as Himself* and gives various instances, one of which is: '*Among the great sages I am Bhrigu....*'

(Concluded.)

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